

The Divine Warrior

Part III: Threat of the Law, Triumph of the Messiah

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands--

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,"

(Eph 2:11-19)

Origin of the Nations

WHAT IS ISRAEL? What are Gentiles. What is the church? How, if at all, are they the same? How are they different? These questions have puzzled many and caused some fairly significant ruptures in the church over the centuries, to the point, sometimes, of hostility. To answer, we need to do a little mining of nuggets from the OT.

In the beginning, there was one man and one woman. **Adam and Eve** were created by God in the Garden of Eden, the first parents of humanity. For literally thousands of years, their children were called the families (*mishpachah*) of the earth. There was no Israel, no Hebrew, no Jew, no Gentle, no *goyim*-nations. There were just families descended from the first couple.

That doesn't mean they were all the same. Scripture tells us that Adam and Eve had three sons, one of whom was murdered. It then makes a point to show you that at least one of the descendants of Cain became worse than him. **Lamech** became the first mentioned polygamist who then murdered a man in a such a haughty arrogant manner that he defied the God of Adam, invoking Cain's deed as precedent (**Gen 4:18-23**). This "seventh from Adam" through the line of Cain is

then paralleled in the other genealogy in the “seventh from Adam” from the line of Seth. [Enoch](#) walked so closely with God that he was taken to heaven without dying ([Gen 5:21-24](#)). Yet, even with this contrast, what we know is that men were calling upon the Name of Yahweh ([Gen 4:26](#)); they all knew who he was and had access to his temple and worship, even if they didn’t want it.

This lasted on past [the Flood](#) for several more generations. Then, something happened. The [Tower of Babel](#) episode was a rebellion of such cosmic proportions that Moses tells us God gave the nations over to the worship of the heavenly host ([Dt 4:19; 17:3; 29:26; 32:8](#)), created beings he assigned to them. Most people do not realize this, but Ephesians has called them by many names: “rule” (*arche*), “authority” (*exousia*), “power” (*dunamis*), “dominion” (*kuriotes*), “names” (*onoma*; [Eph 1:21](#)) and “princes” (*archons*, [2:3](#)). In other words, it presupposes you understand this.

Now, [Genesis 10](#) parallels the Tower story and is an explanation of where the nations originate. This is why it is called “[The Table of Nations](#).” So, for the first time in history you have human groups being talked about as nations, a term much less personal than families. The thing is, at this moment in time and for several more generations, what this

meant as far as the worship of the True God goes is that there *would be no more* worship of him. Paul refers to this later in Ephesians as [this present “darkness”](#) ([Eph 4:18](#); [5:8, 11](#); [6:12](#)), and he has just talked about it as people by nature being under the control of prince of the power of the air (cf. [2:1-3](#)), where people could, at best, feel and grope for God ([Acts 17:26-27](#), directly harkening back to [Dt 32:7-8](#)) like a man lost deep in a pitch-black cave trying to feel his way towards its exit. There wasn’t a single man, woman, or child excluded from this.

Separation of Israel

This lasted until the days of [Abram](#). God came to Abram via a [covenant](#) and chose him to start [a new nation](#), one that had never existed before. This covenant promised that he would one day have a Seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed ([Gen 22:18](#); cf. [12:7](#)). However, God did not do this because Abram’s family were Yahweh worshipers. No, it tells us that he and his uncle and his father “[served other gods](#)” ([Josh 24:2](#)), for that is what all people did under the darkness of this present evil age. It was sheer grace that came because there was another covenant promise

God had made to Eve about one of her children crushing the head of Satan ([Gen 3:15](#)). It had not been fulfilled and God was about to begin to do something about that.

Abraham had Isaac, and Isaac he had Jacob. It was when Jacob grew up and met the LORD face-to-face, wrestling with him physically in the middle of the night, where, [suddenly, the nation of Israel was born](#). For Jacob's name was changed to Israel that night by the Son of God. Jacob had twelve sons, and these became the twelve tribes of Israel. All of these went down into Egypt before ever inheriting the land God had sworn to Abram. There they stayed in captivity for hundreds of years.

Until one day, Moses was called by the same Angel from the midst of a burning bush. The LORD swore to take Moses and the people out of slavery and bondage into a glorious new freedom. But this freedom would be [carefully prescribed](#) in the form of [a covenant of laws](#) that the nation of people would have to keep if they wanted to remain in their Promised Land. That covenant, too, was a covenant of promise, and provided many types which eventually Jesus would fulfill.

But these laws did something else. They separated Israel out from among the nations. “You shall not walk in the customs of the nation(s) that I am driving out before you ... I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the nations” (Lev 20:23-24). It tells you why. “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev 20:26). In other words, by separating them out from the other nations, God was shining a light on this people. He would be their God and they would have access to him, the first people to do so in hundreds, if not thousands of years.

It is important to note that we are not talking here about moral law. It isn’t like Israel was the first people to be obliged to keep moral law. We already saw that with the murders Cain and Lamech. The nations had their covenant with God—a covenant of works, and because of sin, grace could not be found here.

Israel was given its own unique covenants with God. Besides Moses and Abraham, we are talking about things like cleanliness laws, dietary laws, laws that made this sharp cultural distinction between Israel and the nations. Technically speaking, much of this refers then to the law-code of yet another covenant of promise, the Levitical covenant with all

of its priestly codes. These covenants bound all the peoples to them like a wife and a husband. They were **legal indivisible arrangements**.

As God gave Israel these laws of separation, it also needs to be understood that those laws erected **a great wall** between Israel and the Gentiles. Part of this was fine. It taught everyone that to worship the LORD you had to be holy as he is holy. If Gentiles wanted to worship him badly enough, they would usually have to be circumcised, give up all their old customs, and become Jews themselves. But human nature being what it is, these walls also created great hostility. That isn't the fault of the laws, but of sin. **Baruch Maoz** says, “Human pride is always xenophobic: it always resents and rejects those who differ. The Jews, exulting in their Law, considered the Gentiles to be ‘dogs,’ soulless pagans. The Greeks and Romans despised the Jews for their strange dietary traditions, their eschewing of sports and their other national habits.”¹ Jews and Gentiles began to hate and despise each other, and in some ways, nothing has changed in the world since these ancient days.

¹ **Baruch Maoz**, *Judaism is Not Jewish* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 215.

In terms of answering our questions, so far things are pretty easy. You have the nations, that is the Gentiles, and you have the nation of Israel. The nations are walking in darkness, the nation of Israel has access to the light. But not everyone in Israel would take advantage of that light. There were many who did not ever know the LORD. There were others who said they did but were liars. Their hearts were as darkened as the Gentiles. They needed hearts of flesh; they had hearts of stone.

Thus, the OT itself distinguishes between physical Israel and spiritual Israel. There were always two Israels, not just one. It talks about the absolute necessity of faith rather than mere biology. It was faith that saved them, not genealogy. It speaks of God calling some who were Israelites, “Not My People” (Hos 1:9). “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Rom 9:6), the Apostle will later say. This makes the question “who is Israel” more difficult. In one sense, anyone born biologically from Abraham is an Israelite. In another sense, some of those people are not.

This becomes even more complicated in the New Testament. The complication is that somehow Gentiles had become “True Jews” (cf. Rom 2:28-29). But unlike OT types where a Gentile had to adopt the entire OT separation code

of the Jews, including circumcision, now they could be called sons of Abraham and they didn't have to abide by all of those separation laws to do it. Somehow, they who were strangers and at enmity could be brought so near to Israel so that they can literally be called Israel. This part of the question gets at the heart of our passage.

The Second Great Threat of Ephesians 2

In Ephesians, thus far we've seen a great praise cry (1:3-14), the announcement of kingship (1:15-23), a threat (2:1-3), and its triumphal answer (2:4-10). Now, in order to build the tension even more dramatically, **another threat** is introduced to the Lordship of this supposed king Jesus. Will he be able to do anything about it?

Timothy Gombis explains that in the first threat, it is “**the evil angelic powers of while rule the present age**” that must be conquered and defeated. There, it was “**God who triumphs in Christ over his enemies.**” In this **new threat**, we have a very different kind of problem, though it too is “**depicted as an ontological power**” almost with a life of its own that needs to be conquered. This time, it is not God who triumphs in Christ over his enemies (with a focus on the more

Triune nature of God), it is “Christ himself [who] goes about accomplishing victory.”²

This movement of threats reflects the same shift found in Psalm 110, a Psalm that was just cited at the end of Ephesians 1. In that Psalm, Yahweh subjects his enemies to his anointed king before the king himself goes out to conquer his enemies. Remember, Psalm 110:1, “Yahweh [the Father] says to Adonai [the Son], ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” “Yahweh [the Father] has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You [the Son] are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’” (4). Here, it is the Son submitting to the authority of his Father in the incarnation, doing all of his will, that ends up being the means by which the Father subjects his enemies to Messiah. But right after this, “Adonai is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations...” (5-6). Suddenly, now, the Son begins to go out and conquer his enemies. This is the parallel we are now at in Ephesians.

Real Threat: Hopelessness in the World Without God (2:11-12)

² Timothy Gombis, *Dissertation*, 74-75.

The new threat in Ephesians is presented in Eph 2:11-12. Along with the solution, it goes through vv. 16. The structure is parallel to that of 2:1-10.³ It connects to the previous threat with a “Therefore” (Eph 2:11). In other words, because you have been saved by grace through faith which is a gift of God, because this gift of salvation is the proof that God has conquered the evil powers, and because he has pre-destined you beforehand to good works, *therefore...*

He addresses his new comments to one particular group within the church(es). “Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles...” The word “Gentile” in English means “one who is not a Jew.” It derives from a Latin word meaning “race or clan.” The Greek word is *ethnos*, from which we get “ethnic.” In other words, the nations. “Gentiles” are the nations of Genesis 10.

This is explained as being “Gentiles in the flesh.” It is biological. It is demonstrated by the unusual synonym he then uses, “the uncircumcision.” Circumcision is a practice

³ Gombis notes that both are framed by an *inclusio*. 2:2 and 2:10 both use the word “walk,” but with a new emphasis. 2:12 and 19 both use the language of “aliens” and “strangers” but with the change that now they are no longer these, but are members of the household (commonwealth) of Israel. He also notes that both sections begin with an anacoluthon (the absence of an expected grammatical sequence).

of cutting off part of the flesh of the male sex organ. It became the sign of all signs that a Jew was, in fact, a Jew. It was the first separation law that God gave to Abraham as part of his covenant ([Gen 17:10ff](#)). Arnold makes the important observation that it “became a matter of inappropriate ethnic pride for many Jews, who referred to the Gentiles as ‘the uncircumcision’ (lit., ‘those with foreskins’).”⁴ Think about how people use sexual anatomy today as curse and hurt words. Paul is using terminology that may have made a Jewish Christian in the congregation still clinging to his ethnic separation quite pleased, especially if he had it out for a particular Gentile.

But if so, it is [bait and switch](#). For he contrasts these Gentile Christians with “what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—” ([Eph 2:11b](#)). This too is flesh, not spirit. This is performed by the hands of men, not God. In Deuteronomy there are three verses that tell the story of the book.

- *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.* ([Deut 10:16](#))

⁴ Clinton E. [Arnold](#), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 316.

- *But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.* (Deut 29:4)
- *The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.* (Deut 30:6)

This was supposed to be about the heart, not the flesh. God cared about the heart. He told those rebel fleshly circumcised Israelites to circumcise their hearts. He gave them an impossible command. For the LORD alone could give it and he had not yet done so. But the promise was that he *would* do so ... one day, in the new covenant. “*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh*” (Ezek 36:26). In this way, the old covenant(s) promised something, but did not yet deliver upon that promise. This is exactly what Paul is about to unfold to a group of people whom he has now both torn down so that he might lift them up not in themselves, but in Christ.

So the threat is thus far described in stark terms of nations and uncircumcision vs. the fleshly circumcision and Jews. There is a division here. He fleshes this out more in vs. 12. Still talking to Gentiles, “Remember that you were at

that time..." He tells them to remember. They are to remember five things:

- You were at the time separated from Christ
- Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
- Strangers to the covenants of promise
- Having no hope
- Without God in the world

He draws a terribly bleak picture of their life prior to being Christians. They had **no access to the Messiah**, to Christ. The Jews, however, did. This is actually fairly stunning, because he uses the language of the Messiah—Christ. This means that Christ was there in the OT and the Jews had access to him. Of course, there is something about Christ that was predicted in the OT. This was his humanity, but not his presence. Christ was the Jews' God in the OT, their God preincarnate.

Second, they were **alienated from the commonwealth of Israel**. That is, they were not citizens. To try to be a Jew without becoming a one ritually and religiously ritually would have made a Gentile an illegal alien. This is important

because it is through Israel and Israel alone that one has access to Christ. He came to that nation, none other. He was the God of that people, no other.

He did this through [covenants](#). Not one covenant, but many. Paul calls them “[covenants of promise](#).” Though the phrase is unique, the idea is not. 1 Chronicles refers to “[the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac](#)” ([1Ch 16:16](#)). Again, “[The covenant that he had made with David ... he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever](#)” ([2Ch 21:7](#)).

I could probably spend an entire sermon on just this phrase. I’ll just make a couple of comments here that might help you as you think about covenant theology. When the Reformed were developing their covenant system, many came to the conclusion that all of the OT covenants were “[the covenant of grace](#),” a term that they created to explain the unity of all biblical covenants. This covenant of grace included every post-fall covenant in the Bible: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David (they usually leave out Levi, but not always), and the new covenant in Christ. They are all “[the covenant of grace](#).”

Reformed Baptists believed that there was certainly grace in all of these covenants. Each one was God’s gracious

condescension to someone who did not deserve it, to be their God through this ancient type of relationship. However, they also saw that this system **did not account for the newness** of the new covenant in ways that they believed the Scripture taught, especially as it regarding the sacrament of baptism. So they formulated their covenant theology a bit differently. I believe it was more in line with Paul here. He does not call these a (single) covenant of grace, but covenants (plural) of promise.

Rather than one overarching historical covenant that comes in different “administrations,” they saw the covenantal plan of God in eternity past, what the Reformed had called the **Covenant of Redemption**, as working itself out historically in stages, first through a **covenant of works**, then through **covenants of promise**, and finally in the **new covenant** which they called the covenant of grace. It is the Covenant of Redemption that is the single covenant overarching everything.⁵

The new covenant is part of this unfolding Covenant of Redemption, as all covenants are, and therefore it is related to all former covenants in some way. But there was something truly new about the new covenant, even though it was

⁵ It is, as it were, outside of time while all other covenants are historical, being created in time after creation.

typologically related to all of the previous covenants, such that those promised something and Christ was the fulfillment of those promises. In other words, the OT covenants were gracious typological covenants, but they were not the new covenant.⁶ Paul's point here is **not to make a systematic theological statement** about the nature of covenants (those can be inferred), but simply to remind the Gentiles that it was through the covenants that Christ came in a friendly relationship to Israel.

Without these three things, the Gentiles were left hopeless. Because of these three things, the Jews were not. They had hope. And the reason is because this is how they came to know God. Thus, there is a logical and even chronological relationship between these five things:

⁶ This is essentially how the *London Baptist Confession 1689* unfolds the idea of OT covenants when it teaches, “This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocence” (*LBC 7.3*).

To go further, they would then see no one-to-one correspondence, necessarily between the administration of the “covenant sign” being given to infants, for the reason that the covenant of grace is not properly speaking in the OT, even though grace is certain present in all of those covenants. For my own take on this see my *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2009) and more recently, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed-Baptist Primer* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2014).

Christ to Israel through covenants brings hope because this is how God is in the world

As you can see then, the threat was very real to the Gentile. To have no hope in this world is **a very real threat** that many today still face, because they do not know the solution. But Paul is speaking to Christians who *do* know the solution and yet seem to, in at least some way(s), be acting like it hasn't happened occurred. Therefore, he brings to them the triumph of Christ over **the new enemy**.

Triumph: The Wall of Hostility is Destroyed (2:13-16)

You may say, “What enemy? I’ve read the passage. I don’t see any enemy.” The answer is only hinted at in these first two verses, and that hint is in the words “**uncircumcision**,” “**circumcision**,” and perhaps “**covenants of promise**.” Is there any-thing that those things have in common? I’ll let you think about that for a moment.

In **vs. 13**, he begins to tell of the triumph of Christ over this new threat. “**But now in Jesus Christ ...**” This similar to

the change from threat to triumph in vs. 4's "But God..." It is signaling the same overcoming of a threat by the King.

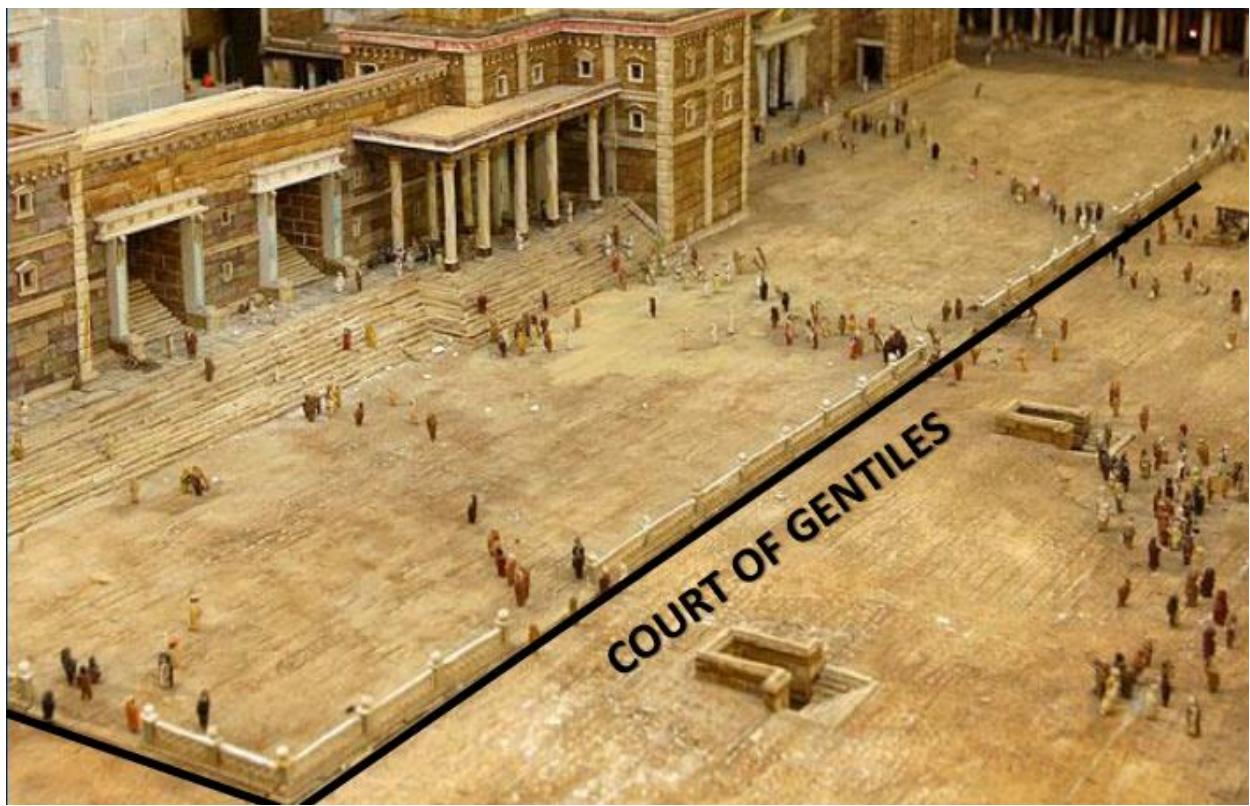
"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near..." Brought near to what? To 1. Christ, 2. The commonwealth of Israel, and 3. The covenant of God, 5. God in the world. Therefore, of course, they should have 4. Hope! They are no longer in that pitiable condition.

What brought them near? "By the blood of Christ" (13b). We've seen his blood already, as that which brought us redemption, forgiveness of sins, and salvation (1:7). This is the very human blood of the God-man. But he explains something new now. "For he himself is our peace." This is not *my* (personal) peace, though of course Jesus is that. He is "our" (corporate, plural) peace. He is talking to the church. He is talking to Gentiles and Jews at Ephesus who both call Christ Lord. He has brought them peace! Together. He has "made us both one." This is objective unity that is true whether people know it, or act upon it, or talk about it, or not.

But look at what it says next, as he focuses especially on the Gentile-Jew problem. "... and has broken down in his

flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (14). This is the interpretive crux of the entire passage. For here is the enemy: the wall of hostility. What is that wall?

I was taught growing up that it was simply the outer court called the court of the Gentiles in the second temple that still stood in Jesus’ day. Gentiles were allowed to enter this part of the temple. There was a large paved area surrounding the temple that measured nearly three-quarters of a mile. It was enclosed by a double colonnade of pillars standing thirty-seven feet high. Inside was the court of Gentiles which was itself separated from the rest of the interior of the temple by a 4 ½ ft. wall.



Gentiles were not allowed access to the inner courts or the temple upon pains of death. **Josephus** told us that there were thirteen stone slabs written in both Greek and Latin that warned Gentiles not to enter. We have discovered two of them. They read, “*No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death.*” Interestingly, Paul was falsely accused in Jerusalem for taking a Gentile, Trophimus from Ephesus, beyond this court (**Acts 21:28-29**).⁷ So he clearly had this on his mind.

But the thing is, the temple is always symbolic. And when Jesus died, this wall did not physically crumble to the ground. Rather, that wall is a good illustration as it stands for something else. What might that be? Long ago, Chrysostom thought it was sin. “*It is the hostility proceeding within the flesh. This was the midwall cutting them off, as the prophet says, ‘Do not your sins stand in the midst between you and me?’ The midwall was the enmity that God had both toward Jews and toward Greeks.*” He adds something important though. “*When the law came this enmity was not dissolved; rather it increased. ‘For the law,’ he says,*

⁷ Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 316–317.

“‘works wrath.’” (*Chrysostom*, *Homily on Ephesians* 5.2.13-15).

Long ago, the *Letter of Aristeas* said, “In his wisdom the legislator [Moses], in a comprehensive survey of each particular part, and being endowed by God for the knowledge of universal truths, surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and worshiping the only God omnipotent over all creation” (*Letter of Aristeas* 139). This is the view of many scholars and Fathers.⁸ Importantly, the Reformer Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600) explained,

⁸ “That *wall* which set up *hostility* is best understood as the Mosaic law and its scribal interpretation, which both protected Israel by keeping her separate from the other nations, and prevented the Gentiles from having access to God because of Judaism’s particularism ... This view is confirmed if in v. 13 *far off* means that the Gentiles were kept at a distance from Israel which alone was a people near to God (cf. Ps 148:14).” *Ralph P. Martin*, “Ephesians,” *New Bible Commentary*: ed. D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs, and D. J. Wiseman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1970), 1111-1112; “The barrier in question was the Mosaic law with its detailed holiness code, which made it all but impossible for faithful Jews to live in close proximity with Gentiles.” *Max Turner*, “Ephesians.” *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. edited D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1231 [1222-44]; “For the enmity, which was between them like a wall and divided the circumcision from the uncircumcision and the uncircumcision from the circumcision, was abolished by the Savior. His command is that the Jew should not so presume on his circumcision as to reproach the Gentile, nor should the Gentile trust in his uncircumcision, that is, his paganism, so as to abhor the Jew.” (*Ambrosiaster*, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.14.1).

“He means not the moral law, which is perpetual: but the ceremonial law only ... that is, in rites and ceremonies (‘through [the] flesh’), which was a shadow of things to come.” (**Niels Hemmingsen**, *Ephesians*, 92-93).

This was hinted at in calling the Christians “The Circumcision” and “The Uncircumcision.” That’s **ceremonial law** made with hands. This becomes explicit in vs. 15. “By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create him himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (**Eph 2:15-16**). It was not, “You shall not murder” or “you shall not commit adultery” that separated the Jews and Gentiles. It was, “You shall be circumcised on day eight.” It was, “You shall divide between clean and unclean animals.” It was, “You shall not wear clothing made from two kinds of material.”

These created the hostility. These created the separation. This was their stated purpose, as we have seen. If you think he is talking about moral law here, then you do not understand that moral law did not separate Jews and Gentiles. The whole world is held accountable to before God for obeying the moral commandments (**Rom 3:19**). But Jesus destroyed

this ceremonial wall of hostility objectively, it says at the cross.

How did that happen? It seems to me it happens in a couple of ways. **First**, those laws were finally kept perfectly by Jesus Christ. Therefore, their purpose for complete holiness was fulfilled in Christ. They are no longer needed. **Second**, his death did something to the legal requirements of the law. This gets back to what I said earlier about covenants legally binding people to God in an indissoluble manner.

Paul explains this by way of analogy in Romans. “**Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage**” (**Rom 7:1-2**). There is something about death that dissolves the covenant obligation. It is Christ’s death that dissolved the need for these divisions … if a person is *in Christ*. That is, if they participate in his death by being united to the Head as its Body. Therefore, if Christ died and you are in Christ, then you have died to law. These wall that separated Jew and Gentile is destroyed. All are one in Christ Jesus.

Perceived vs. The Real Threat

But I need to make a point here. It seems like the churches of the NT, including Ephesus and the surrounding area, still saw this as a real threat. It is the same today. **The threat is** that if we aren't careful, people might just eliminate these old distinctions and divisions and this would be counter to God's plan. Some make such sharp distinctions, still, between Israel and the church without distinguishing the physical and the spiritual that to even speak like this sounds to them like antisemitism. **John Hagee** makes it clear, "If you believe that God has replaced the Jewish people as his chosen people then you're ignorant about God's word ... Those who advance Replacement Theology are advancing an anti-Semitic theology."⁹ Others struggle mightily in similar yet distinct ways. A Jew who converted to Christianity who wrote the *Foreword* to my friend Baruch Maoz' book says,

I [trusted Jesus as my Messiah and Lord] recognizing that the Jewish community would consider me a traitor. I did so recognizing that many of my neighbors, clients, and friends would

⁹ Cited **John Hagee** in Abra Forman, "CUFI's Hagee on Israel: 'Will Christians Be on the Right Side if History?'" *Breaking Israel News* (July 21, 2016), <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/72342/bin-exclusive-cufis-pastor-hagee-will-christians-americans-right-side-history/>.

turn their backs upon me. I did so recognizing that the Jewish organizations for which I had worked would no longer welcome me ...

In remember in those early years the very serious conversations I had with countless Jewish believers from all over [Israel] about how we are to live our lives. Among the questions we asked were these: “How are we Jews to function in what is primarily a Gentile world?” Do we remain separate from Gentile believers, or do we worship with them?” If we are to worship with them, will we have to join churches?” “Won’t this lead to assimilation?” “Mustn’t this be avoided at all costs?” As an alternative, should we strive to create a synagogue for our worship?” If so ... what will happen to our Gentile brothers and sisters who want to worship with us? Won’t this make them feel like second class citizens?” ...

[People feared], “If we don’t keep our families in a Messianic congregation, our grandchildren will not be Jewish.” One extreme statement was that, “If we don’t keep the Law, we could wind up least in the family of God?” Then came the pronouncements: we will identify ourselves as the Fourth Branch of Judaism: “messianic Judaism.” We will establish “Messianic Synagogues.” We will proclaim our leaders to be “Rabbis.” We will declare that we are NOT Christians! We are Messianic Jews!!!

Though I met some wonderful people in the “Movement”
... I soon realized that most of them had not been raised as
“Jews” or, indeed, were not Jewish!¹⁰

We can extend this to more than Jews and Gentiles though, as even Paul did; (cf. Gal 3:28) to many kinds of hostility that world knows: *male and female* (the battle of the sexes; the crazy feminism and man hating; the terrible patriarchy that views women as chattel/property rather than image-bearing co-heirs with Christ), *black and white* or whatever other colors (the politically-correct post-modern neo-Marxist division of Americans into ethnic groups like African-Americans and Mexican Americans and Native Americans, rather than *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one: Americans; the racism of the KKK or the alt-right); *rich or poor* (class envy; bigotry against the poor; looking down our noses at the rich; discrimination; reverse discrimination); *oppressed and oppressor*; *slave or free*; *young or old*; or any other possible thing you can think of that does not involve deliberate, willful, defiant sin.¹¹

¹⁰ Stan Telchin, Foreword: Trusting My Jewish Saviour, in Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is Not Jewish* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 22, 23. Spelling and punctuation changed to reflect American standards.

¹¹ Here I think of something like gay or straight; this is not among those in the list. But we still need to think properly about this. Paul talks about homosexuality with the Corinthians and does so in a list of other sins (sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuality, thieves, greedy,

All kinds of people see this perceived threat: Orthodox Jews, ancient Romans, modern Muslims, Syrian nationalists, American Prosperity preachers, Lutheran Nazis, Messianic Jews, some Dispensational zealots, woke-progressive postmodernists, age-segregating target-marketing seeker-sensitives, compassionate identity politics Reformed people. These all seek to divide and tear asunder what Christ has made one.

The kind of unity Paul speaks of here is [unheard of in world history](#), and for some reason, a lot of Christians have forgotten it, even though it cost Christ his own blood. Paul will not stand for those who place such divisions within the body of Christ. Outside of Christ, those divisions remain, but only because they refuse to come to Christ for forgiveness of sins and freedom in him. There is no one who

drunkards, revilers, swindlers; [1Co 6:9](#)). He speaks directly about many of these things presently occurring throughout the book (a man sleeping with his step-mother (ch. 5); people suing each other as greedy and perhaps thieves (ch. 6); issues of adultery (ch. 7); people and idolatry (8-10); drunkards (11). Sometimes they were even bragging about their sin ([1Co 5:1-2](#)). Therefore, it is possible that homosexual activity was still occurring in the Corinthian church.

Bragging about sin isn't too different from what many are doing today with homosexuality. But Paul would not tolerate any of this in the church. If they were bragging, the solution as to cast them out in order that they might repent. If they weren't bragging, then the solution was to call them to remember first that no one who is "unrighteous" will inherit the kingdom of God. He then reminds them that, even though they are presently engaging in sinful behavior, "[such were some of you](#)." In other words, your identity is not in these things any longer. It is in Christ. There is no such thing as a "homosexual Christian." Only a Christian. Christ does not see you through your sins, but through Christ's righteousness. Your sins are not your identity. Therefore, stop behaving like this. In other words, the whole equation of gay and straight being likened to male and female or black and white is a category mistake. Biological differences are one thing. Behavioral rejection of God's law is totally different.

has sinned in such a way that Jesus' blood is not sufficient for them. If they would, then they would know that such divisions are antithetical to the Christian message.

Victory Shout (Eph 2:17)

This leads to vs. 17 and what someone has called the divine warrior's "victory shout." The verse says, "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." He speaks here of Gentiles (far off) and Jews (near). Some people see this verse as an almost throw-away line. What is it here?

You have to understand that in divine warrior epics, there is always a shout of victory made by the conqueror. This is exactly the purpose of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here we are not talking about "God has a wonderful plan for your life," as is often thought to be our message. We are talking about the one who has in his death conquered the powers of world, the flesh, and the devil, and the wall that has divide the peoples for so long. Now that's a message!

When does this preaching occur? Some see it in the proclamation Jesus himself gave while on earth. Some see it as his

proclamation to the wicked spirits in hell. Some see it as his proclamation to the powers of heaven at his ascension. But it is the preaching to Jews and Gentiles that is in mind here. It takes place each and every time the peoples are made aware of this victory through the proclamation of the Gospel, be it by Christ, the Apostles, or any proclamation thereafter in Christ's church. For they are all one through the mystical union. This is the duty of the church-militant, the body of Christ on earth in this day of darkness to shout aloud his victory!

Celebration (2:18-19)

What does such proclamation of this victory do? In every divine warrior epic, the people who are loyal to the God or the King **celebrate victory** and do so at his temple (e.g., **Pss 24:3-6; 47:5-9; 48:8-14; Rev 7:13-15**). We see the temple immediately after this, but here we conclude for today, “**Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**” (**Eph 2:18-19**). He is telling them that they

now have access to God through Christ, that they can together come and worship him and praise his Name, because the Spirit has been granted, the threats have been defeated, the victory has been won.

It is high time Christ's church stop dividing Christians up into never-ending group segments. Racism, sexism, identity politics, none of that is tolerable in Christ's church. They are a mockery of Christ's work. Together, we are one body with the head being Christ. Only when we recapture this message of threat and victory in the dividing walls of hostility that have plagued the nations for so many thousands of years will our proclamation once more have the ability to create shouts and celebrations that will make the world turn and take notice that here we have people single-minded committed to the King of all creation.

Select Bibliography

Ambrosiaster. *Epistle to the Ephesians*.

Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

Chrysostom. *Homily on Ephesians 4.2.8*.

Gombis, Timothy. "The Triumph of God in Christ: Divine Warfare in the Argument of Ephesians." A Dissertation at the University of St. Andrews. 2005. <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/2321/TimothyGombisPhDthesis.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>.

Hagee, John. In Abra Forman, "CUFI's Hagee on Israel: 'Will Christians Be on the Right Side if History?'" *Breaking Israel News* (July 21, 2016): <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/72342/bin-exclusive-cufis-pastor-hagee-will-christians-americans-right-side-history/>.

Hemmingsen, Niels. *The Epistle of the Blessed Apostle Saint Paule Which He, in the Time of His Trouble and Imprisonment, Sent in Writing from Rome to the Ephesians*. London: Thomas East, 1580.

Martin, Ralph P. "Ephesians." *New Bible Commentary*. Ed. D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs, and D. J. Wiseman. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1970.

Maoz, Baruch. *Judaism is Not Jewish*. Great Britain: Mentor, 2003.

Telchin, Stan. "Foreword: Trusting My Jewish Saviour." In Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is Not Jewish*. Great Britain: Mentor, 2003.

Turner, Max. "Ephesians." *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Edited D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Van Dorn, Douglas. *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Primer*. Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2014.

_____. *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism*. Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2009.