

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

THE NEW ISRAEL

Read Ephesians 2:17-22

Introduction

As we embark on the new definition of Israel, it is important to note that the Messiah also decreed the end of the Jewish monopoly as the exclusive people of God:

"Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." (Matthew 21:43)

Now he commanded his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), to "go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15), to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Gentiles and Jews together became "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). The civil laws intended for the nation of Israel in the Promised Land, while good and useful, had become obsolete as the nation embraced believers throughout the world.

"... and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." (Ephesians 2:16-17)

Last week, we spent some time explaining how Jesus "abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Ephesians 2:15), because this is often misunderstood and disregarded by us - Gentile Christians. But know this: for you the Messiah (Christ, "Anointed One") changed his whole plan and now reconciles you to God together with his beloved Jewish people. Instead of treating Gentiles and Jews differently, now they have become in the Messiah "one new man out of the two," ending the Gentile-Jew hostility, "thus making peace" (Ephesians 2:15).

Access to the Father

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." (v18)

Yes, on its face it means that Jew and Gentile are now on equal footing before God.

But I want us to think about the concept of "access." In the Middle East, a monarch's presence was exclusive. Only a few courtiers had the privilege of being with him. If a person had a petition -- and he were a citizen -- he might have an appointment to bring the need to the king. Non-citizens had no standing whatsoever. No rights. No access. They could write their requests and hope that the king would consider them, but he had no obligation to do so. They were not citizens.

We Christians have a special access to God not granted to others. Yes, they can pray and hope, but they have no privilege. Their prayers are based on hope and desperation. Our prayers are offered "through faith in him" and spring from "freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12).

Made One in Christ

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (vv19-22)

Paul refers to Christians of Gentile background. They should not regard themselves as “second-class citizens” in God’s kingdom in any regard. They are not only full citizens, but also full and equal members of God’s household.

Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets: Because we are one body and have the same access to God, it also follows that we are all built upon a common foundation. That foundation is the original apostles and prophets, and their enduring revelation, recorded in the New Testament. May no one ever lay any other foundation.

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone: This corner stone “literally means at the tip of the angle. It refers to the capstone or binding stone that holds the whole structure together... often the royal name was inscribed on it. In the East it was considered to be even more important than the foundation.”

In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord: As we keep to our common foundation, the whole building of God’s people grows together in a beautiful way, as a holy temple where God dwells in beauty and glory. This tells us 3 things:

- This tells us that the Church **is a building**, perfectly designed by the Great Architect. It is not a haphazard pile of stones, randomly dumped in a field. God arranges the Church for His own glory and purposes.
- This tells us that the Church **is a dwelling place**, a place where God lives. It is never to be an empty house that is virtually a museum, with no one living inside. The Church is to be both the living place of God and His people.
- This tells us that the Church **is a temple**, holy and set apart to God. We serve there as priests, offering the spiritual sacrifices of our lips and hearts, our praises to God (Hebrews 13:15).

You also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit: When Solomon’s temple was built, the stones were prepared at a place far from the temple building sight. It was said that you couldn’t hear the sound of a hammer or axe or other iron tools at the sight (1 Kings 6:7). In the same way, God prepares us first, and then He fits us into His building.

I found this quote: “The Father makes choice of this house, the Son purchases it, the Holy Ghost takes possession of it.”

God’s work in the Church gives glory to the wisdom, power, and love of God. As we examine the Church, we should praise God for His glorious Church.

- There is nothing as noble as the Church, seeing that it is the temple of God.
- There is nothing so worthy of reverence, seeing God who dwells in it.
- There is nothing so ancient since the patriarchs and prophets worked to building it.
- There is nothing so solid since Jesus Christ is the foundation of it.
- There is nothing so high since it reaches as high as to the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
- There is nothing so perfect and well proportioned since the Holy Spirit is the architect.
- There is nothing more beautiful, because it is adorned with building stones of every age, every place, every people; from the highest kings to the lowest peasants; with the most brilliant scientists and the simplest believers.
- There is nothing more spacious, since it is spread over the whole earth, and takes in all who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
- There is nothing so Divine, since it is a living building, animated and inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to our old place outside of God's blessing and privilege, we now have been given wonderful blessings:

- Access to the Father by the Spirit through Christ (a Trinitarian concept)
- Citizenship with God's people
- Family membership in God's household

Notice that our privileges are with God's people, not instead of God's people. The Bible knows no "Lone Ranger" Christians, only believers in fellowship with the other believers in their locality. Yes, there is a place and time for spiritual retreat. Jesus and others drew away for a time of spiritual solitude, fasting, and prayer, but then came back again to be with God's people. But being a perpetual hermit is an aberration, not our command. Our sense of identity according to Ephesians is as part of God's people, part of God's household, stones "being built together" to become a temple.

All who put their faith in Christ, Jews, and Gentiles, are part of the same people of God now.

Spiritual Masonry

Verses 21 and 22 use three interesting words which describe Jesus' spiritual masonry:

- **"Joined together"** (NIV, ESV, NRSV) and "fitly framed together" (KJV) speaks of laying one piece upon another. Have you ever laid a brick or stone walkway? Or built a block wall? Then you know how important and exacting the joinery process is.
- **"Grows into"** (NRSV, ESV, KJV), "rises to become" (NIV) speaks of the building gradually rising, becoming greater and greater as it is formed."
- **"Built together"** suggests "build up (together) or construct various parts."

Ephesians 2:22 has always meant a great deal to me. It says that when Christians gather, we become together a "dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (RSV). There is a special sense in which God meets with his people when they are gathered in his name.

Jesus spoke of the spiritual power of the gathered church:

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (**Matthew 18:20**)

It's not that he isn't with us as individuals, but that in a very special sense he meets with us when we gather to honour him with brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe that God wishes to fill our gatherings with his presence as powerfully as he did the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) when the Shekinah glory of God became so great that the priests could not perform their ministry because of the greatness of the glory of God in his house.

We have been called to be building blocks in a temple that becomes "the dwelling place of God in the Spirit." From alienation and separateness, we have truly been brought inside God's house to become part of its very structure, to see him in his glory. What a wonderful and high calling!

