

# The Case for Torah

A Study of Ephesians Chapter 2

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# Ephesians Introduction

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **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 (Ephesians 2:14–15, emphasis ours).

The above verses are often sourced as evidence that the Mosaic Law has been done away with. According to this interpretation, the law stood as a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, preventing their unity. When Christ died, he broke down this wall, effectively removing the barrier, ending the rules and regulations found in the first five books of the Bible.

For many Christians, this interpretation makes the most sense. The context of the passage is clearly division between Jews and Gentiles, and the verses in question directly mention the abolishment of the law of commandments. Added to the plain text, most of us have been taught for centuries that the law came to an end at the cross. We have this prior understanding as the foundation on which we build our interpretation.

With this interpretation, several questions arise. What does it mean that Christ abolished the law? Didn't he say he would not do this (Matthew 5:17)? Doesn't God say his Word is eternal (Psalm 119:89,152)? In the Torah, he gives command after command that is to endure through all generations (for example: Leviticus 23:14,21,31,41). How can something that is to endure through all generations come to an end? Also, if Jesus did break down the law and therefore our need to obey it, does this include all of the law, to include the Ten Commandments? Are these no longer binding as well?

An honest examination of our interpretation, and any interpretation, must wrestle with these issues, and more. We must also acknowledge the role played by our previous understandings, worldviews, doctrines, etc. We do not approach this passage, or anything in life for that matter, as an empty slate.

Be that as it may, it is our duty as hearers and then doers of the Word of God, to first hear and understand, and then to apply. With that goal in mind, we approach this passage with our number one rule.

## The Number One Rule

Most likely you have heard of the number one rule in real estate: Location, location, location. Similarly, the number one rule to biblical interpretation is context, context, context! In truth, this is the most important rule to understanding any piece of writing, whether it be a book of the Bible, a letter someone wrote to my grandmother, or a poem dated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If we do not understand the context of the writing, we will be hard-pressed to come up with an accurate understanding of what the original author was trying to communicate. With regard to the verses at hand, we simply cannot pull one or two verses out of Ephesians and claim understanding without first looking at the big picture.

Therefore, before we seek to understand Ephesians 2:14-15, let's go through the basic message of chapters one and two and gather some thematic clues as to what Paul is addressing.

## **Chapter One**

Paul opens with a customary greeting, identifying himself as the author, and the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, as the recipients. These saints include both Jews and Gentiles. We soon learn that Gentiles are a target audience of much of the letter; later in chapters two and three they are specifically addressed. In fact, much of Ephesians is speaking directly to Gentiles.

Paul begins by describing the abundant blessings that have been lavished upon the believers in Ephesus. These blessings allude to Genesis 12:3, where Abraham is told, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Through the Seed of Abraham, which is Christ himself (Galatians 3:16), blessing has been poured upon the nations. Paul details this blessing to include adoption as sons (5), redemption (7), forgiveness of sins (7), and the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance (11-14). Paul does not specifically mention Abraham here in Ephesians. However, he does mention key words such as blessing, adoption, and inheritance. In some of Paul's other letters, these same words are directly connected to Abraham and the blessing we receive through him. For example, in Romans four and Galatians 3:26-4:7, Paul describes adoption as sons and inheritance as key components of the blessing we receive through our father Abraham.

In addition to these blessings, Paul repeatedly depicts a revelation of knowledge and wisdom (1:8-10,17,18). He clarifies this mystery and knowledge as a uniting of the church as one body under one Head (which is Christ) (1:10, 22-23). Tim Hegg, in his paper on the dividing wall in Ephesians, notes the following:

That the Gentiles should be blessed within the scope of the Abrahamic promise was never questioned. What had been left a mystery was the exact manner in which the blessing would come upon the nations, and this was revealed to the Apostles and especially to Paul (3).

We see the unveiling of this mystery and the implications of this blessing unfold in the first few chapters of Ephesians: the Gentiles are fully included, co-heirs, adopted into God's family, united with the Jews, citizens of the Kingdom. They are not just blessed through Abraham, but rather become themselves children of Abraham, sons of God.

One more key idea presents itself for the first time (and certainly not the last!) in Ephesians one: Christ is the head, above all other rule and authority (20-23). Everything is under his feet. This is not a separate idea, disconnected from the inclusion of Gentiles into God's family. Rather, it is critically involved, integral to the accomplishment of the mystery of God. We will expand on this as we continue our examination.

## Chapter Two

Beginning in chapter two, Paul details what God accomplished through Christ. A primary theme in 2:1-10 is a transfer of kingdoms, and therefore, a transfer of rulership. Previously, the Ephesians were dead in their trespasses and sins (2:1). They followed the ways of this world and the prince of the power of the air (2:2). The “ruler” of their previous kingdom, the “prince of the power of the air,” is the devil. Its citizens were his children, “sons of disobedience” (2:2). He held rule and authority over them. They had an inheritance in him, an inheritance of death. They pursued their sinful passions and were by nature, children of wrath (2:3).

What a desperate, hopeless state. But then we read two glorious words: “But God.” God acted on their behalf and drastically changed everything. He made them alive with Christ (2:5). He seated them with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6; and thus above the rulers and authorities, cf 1:20). This was accomplished not by anything they did (quite obviously, since they were dead and by nature children of wrath) but rather by his amazing grace (2:8-9).

This is intricately related to the great mystery that has been revealed. There has been a transfer of kingdoms and, therefore, a transfer of rulership. The Ephesians (and all believers in Christ) are no longer under the prince of the power of the air. We are not his children. Instead, we have been made alive, reborn if you will, having a new Father, re-created under a new ruler. We are God's workmanship. We belong to him, and we will not walk according to the ways of this world, but according to the good works God has prepared in advance for us to walk in (2:10). This idea is critical to understanding Ephesians, including 2:14-15, as we will soon see.

Paul, like any other, does not write in a vacuum. What follows is connected to what came before it. Paul addresses his readers as Gentiles *in the flesh*; in other words, they were not physically born into Abraham's family; they were from the nations. The implication of “in the flesh” is that they are still Gentiles in the flesh, but no longer Gentiles “in the spirit.” “Gentile” refers to those who are of the nations, not of God's kingdom. Thus Paul says, they once were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God (2:12). Remember, their ruler was the prince of the air and their inheritance in him was death. They were Gentiles in flesh and spirit.

Yet in Christ, they are no longer Gentiles in the spirit, but rather spiritual children of Abraham. Before they were alienated from the covenants of promise (2:12); now they are adopted and full members of the covenant that they were once alienated from (1:5, 2:19). They have been brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13). This should, once again, bring to mind the Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12:3, that through Abraham all nations would be blessed. In other words, Gentiles in the flesh have been adopted into God's family. He has become their inheritance. Their citizenship has been transferred to God's Kingdom.

Now we see why God has brought peace between those who were far off (Gentiles in the flesh who now believe) and those who were near (Jews in the flesh who also believe) (13,17). They are now part of the same Kingdom. They are fellow citizens, members of the same household (19). They are joined together to become a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (21-22).

Sandwiched between this uniting under one kingdom, we find our verses in question:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (2:13-16).

Now that we have an understanding of the surrounding context, of the themes of blessing, inheritance, and transfer of citizenship, we are in a better place to interpret these verses. But first, there are a few more things to consider.

### **Continuing Themes in Ephesians**

It is not surprising that these same themes do not stop at the end of chapter two but carry through the remainder of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is helpful to look at these to gain the overall picture of Paul's message. Paul has already established that Jews (in the flesh) and Gentiles (in the flesh) have been united as members of the same family. They are all spiritual brothers and sisters. In 3:6, Paul continues this idea, saying the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ. In chapters four and five, Paul gives application to this theology of unity, detailing what a unified body should look like. This is key! Paul's understanding of unity among believers does not stop at theology of what it is and how it is accomplished. Rather, true unity extends to action. If we are members of the same family, we ought to act accordingly.

We also see Paul continue the theme of our mutual inheritance in Christ (God's kingdom/family), contrasted with our previous inheritance (Satan's kingdom/family). In 3:6, he says Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs. In 3:15, Paul says that *every* family in heaven and on earth derives its name from the Father. In other words, we belong to him, not to the rulers and authorities. We will show that Gentiles once derived their name from the rulers and authorities, and ultimately from the devil, but do so no longer. In 4:17-19, Paul once again describes the citizens of the other kingdom and their inheritance to the prince of the power of the air. Similar to 2:1-3, here in chapter four, Paul says this about the Gentiles:

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and

have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (4:18–19).

Here, of course, Paul is referring to those who are Gentiles in the flesh and spirit, spiritual children of the devil.

Another key idea that continues beyond chapter two is the idea of the mystery that has been revealed, which we know from chapter one has to do with unity in Christ (1:10). At the start of chapter three, Paul explains this mystery in more detail:

... how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel** ... To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:3-6,8-10, emphasis ours).

Here, Paul defines this mystery: that the Gentiles are full participants in the body of the Messiah. They have an equal share in the inheritance (“fellow heirs”), are members of the same body, and receive the same promises granted to Israel. This, in fact, has been God's plan from the very beginning, yet until now this plan was hidden (3:9). Later, in 6:19, Paul again mentions this mystery, asking for prayer that he may boldly preach the mystery of the gospel.

Finally, Paul uses the theme of the “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” throughout Ephesians. In addition to what we have already examined in chapters one and two, the phrase “rulers and authorities” shows up in chapters three and six. In 3:10, Paul says that God made his manifold wisdom known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This echoes 1:20-21, in which Christ is seated above all rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. In chapter six, we arrive at one of the most well known passages dealing with spiritual warfare, which states our battle is against the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (6:12). Because Paul mentions this specific phrase so many times in Ephesians, we ought to consider its significance. Specifically, how is it related to the unity between believers, both Gentile and Jew in the flesh? How is it related to the dividing wall that has been removed? We will examine these in detail.

## **A Look at Colossians**

As we study the opening chapters of Ephesians, we can't help but notice the striking similarities to its sister text, Paul's letter to the Colossians. In Colossians, Paul expresses many similar themes, phrases, and ideas. In 1:9, he prays for the Colossians to be filled with *knowledge*. In 1:12, he refers to their

share in the *inheritance*. In 1:13, he encourages that the Colossians have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the *kingdom* of his beloved Son. In 1:16, he writes that Christ is the creator of all *thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities* (cf. Colossians 2:10,15). In 1:17-18, he states that Christ is *head over all*. In 1:26-28, he writes of the *mystery* that has been *revealed*, the riches of God's glory *among the Gentiles*. In 1:21-22, he discusses how the Gentiles were once *alienated* and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, but now have been *reconciled in his body of flesh by his death*. In 2:13, he says they were *dead in their trespasses*, yet God *made them alive together with him*. With so many similar wordings and themes, we would be wise to consider Colossians as we seek to understand Ephesians. As we compare the texts, we hope to gain insight into what Paul meant when he said Christ broke down “the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”

## **Rulers and Authorities**

Who are the rulers and authorities and why is their subversion so important to the message of Ephesians? The rulers and authorities are beings that exist in the heavenly places. They are given a certain amount of dominion and power. Yet Paul is insistent that Jesus is seated in the heavenly places far above them all (1:21). Moreover, those who were dead in their trespasses have been raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly places, showing that these believers are above any ruling authority the heavenly powers might claim over them (2:6). The rulers and authorities are not ignorant of this, for God has made this mystery known to them (3:10). Though they are “heavenly rulers,” they are not aligned with God and his kingdom. Rather, they are “spiritual forces of evil” (6:12). Though they have been defeated, they continue to wage war against God's people (6:10-20).

In Colossians 2:15, Paul says that Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities, putting them to open shame and triumphing over them. In Colossians 2:14 we learn how Christ defeated and disarmed them: Paul says the record of indebtedness was nailed to the cross. In our examination of [Colossians 2](#), we argue that this record of indebtedness was to the rulers and authorities. Gentiles were previously under their demonic rulership, and therefore their regulations; they were “indebted” to them. But now, they have been set free from their rule. In Ephesians, Paul reminds his readers of their freedom from the rulers and authorities, and moreover, their position over the rulers and authorities.

Throughout the Bible, we find support for the idea that the Gentiles have been placed under the rulership of demonic beings, and ultimately, under the rule of the devil. In Luke 5, Satan says that he owns all the kingdoms of the earth and that he will give them to Jesus if Jesus will worship him:

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, **for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will**. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve’” (Luke 4:5–8, emphasis ours).

What is so interesting about these verses is that not only does the devil have authority over all the kingdoms of the world, but also, he has the power to give this authority to whom he wishes. He has delegated his ruling of the nations to the rulers and authorities. Several other passages in the Bible support the idea of demonic control over the nations.

To begin, in Deuteronomy we read:

And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, **things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven** (4:19, emphasis ours).

This verse warns the Israelites not to worship the sun, moon, and stars, and the host of heaven, and appears to state that the LORD gave these things to the nations (non-Israelites) to bow down to and worship.

Compare this to what Paul says in Romans 1 about those who worshipped false gods:

Therefore God **gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen (Romans 1:24–25, emphasis ours).

Here in Romans one, Paul explains that God gave these idolators over to the sinful desires of their hearts, allowing them to do what their flesh insisted upon: worship creation instead of the Creator. Likewise, in Deuteronomy, Moses explains that God gave the nations over to this same sinful inclination, and this became their inheritance. Compare this also to Acts 7:42, in which Stephen, referring to the golden calf incident says,

But God turned away and gave them over to worship **the host of heaven** (emphasis ours).

Note that, in this case, it is Israel itself who has been given over to worship the host of heaven. When Israel worshipped the golden calf, they denied their inheritance, God himself, and accepted the inheritance of the nations. Sadly this was repeated throughout Israel's history, as Stephen further documents, citing Amos 5:25-27.

In Deuteronomy 32, we read that God has given nations different “sons of God” as their inheritance, whereas Israel's inheritance is God Himself:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage (Deuteronomy 32:8–9).

Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman III, in reference to this passage, says the following:

The Bible here, we would argue, refers to God's angelic creatures who make up his heavenly council as “the sons of God.” These are angels, in other words, “assigned” to different nation states (251).

These nations have not aligned themselves with the God of Israel. Instead, they have their own angelic rulers, which God has allowed them to have. One day the nations as well as their rulers will be called to judgment:

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders (Isaiah 24:21–23).

Again, in Psalm 82, God takes his place as judge over the “divine council, in the midst of the gods” (v.1) and over the “sons of the Most High” (v.6). These ungodly spiritual rulers fall (v.7) and God arises and inherits the nations (v.8). All people become His, as they were originally intended to be at the creation of mankind.

We see additional support for the idea that the nations are under some type of angelic authority in Daniel when Gabriel, who was sent with a message from God to Daniel, says the following:

The **prince of the kingdom of Persia** withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, **one of the chief princes**, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia (Daniel 10:13, emphasis ours).

The prince of Persia is commonly understood to be an evil angelic being who rules over and represents that nation. Longman states that there is a “cosmic battle that parallels the earthly struggles of God's people. The 'prince of the Persian kingdom' is a supernatural being who fights on behalf of that human kingdom” (250). Likewise, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., a scholar on the book of Daniel, says this prince is “the satanic agent assigned to the sponsorship and control of the Persian realm” (125). The same idea is found earlier in Daniel, where we read about “the watchers,” who are angelic beings, making rulings, judgments, and decrees (Daniel 4:13-17). This is consistent with Deuteronomy 4:19, in which God allots to the nations the host of heaven. With this understanding, the demonic being named the prince of Persia would be Persia's “allotment,” or inheritance. As discussed above, this nation would first and foremost be ascribed to the devil, and then assigned to its particular demonic ruler.

As we discussed in [Colossians](#), the nations voluntarily chose to serve false gods instead of the One True God. God then turned them over to the created demonic spirits (such as the prince of Persia in Daniel) as their rulers, instead of the Creator. Thus the nations were led by demons, and the nations voluntarily submitted to them, placing themselves into their indebtedness.

According to Colossians, with the coming of Christ, this note of indebtedness was nailed to the cross.

Because of his obedience to death on the cross, Christ was exalted above every other ruler. As Paul says in Philippians two,

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (8-11).

He therefore had the authority and power to cancel anyone's indebtedness to these rulers. Now those among the nations who respond to the gospel are no longer under the authority of the demons, but rather, are under God, and thus salvation has been opened to all nations. Furthermore, this paved the way for its ultimate fulfillment after the seventh trumpet when the angel proclaims:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15; cf Psalm 82:8)

One day God will declare that those kingdoms whose former inheritance was the heavenly host (i.e. demonic rulers and authorities) now belong to our God and King!

## Ephesians 2:14-15

Let's now return to the verses in question:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **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 (Ephesians 2:14–15, emphasis ours).

Based on these verses, we know:

1. Christ broke down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.
2. This was accomplished by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.
3. The result is unity and peace between believing Jews and Gentiles.

What does it mean that Christ “broke down” in his flesh the dividing wall? The Greek for “broke down” is *λυω* (*luo*), which can mean to loose, untie, free, destroy, and/or abolish (BDAG, 606-607). *Luo* can be used in a very simple sense, such as that of undoing a sandal (Mark 1:7) or untying a donkey (Matthew 21:2). However, sometimes it has more spiritual connotations. For example, *luo* is used in the following passages:

- Luke 13:16: Jesus refers to a woman who needed to be **loosed** from her bondage to Satan.

- 1 John 3:8: The Son of God has appeared to **destroy** the works of the devil.
- Revelation 1:5-6: Jesus has **freed** us from our sins and made us a kingdom.

In these examples, *luo* is used to refer to a destruction of Satan's work and of his hold on individual lives. It is also used to refer to our freedom from sin, which then enables us to be part of God's kingdom. Since the themes of spiritual forces (“rulers and authorities”) and transfer of kingdom citizenship are prominent in Ephesians, perhaps Paul is using *luo* in a similar sense here in Ephesians two. What has he broken down in his flesh? Based on the above usages of *luo*, it could be a bond that Satan holds, something that is the work of the devil, something that keeps us trapped in our sins and in the kingdom of the devil.

Paul depicts what Christ broke down as *μεστοιχον του φραγμου* (*mesotoichon tou phragmou*). *Mesotoichon* literally means “middle wall” (Hoehner, 368). It is difficult to understand the connotations of this term because it is “rarely used in classical literature, not used in the LXX [Septuagint—Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures], and occurs only here in the NT” (ibid). *Phragmou* denotes fencing in, blocking up, or fortification (ibid). It is used several times in the Septuagint and four times in the New Testament (Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1, Luke 14:23, Ephesians 2:14). In the Septuagint and the gospels, it is used to describe a fence around a vineyard or field, or a wall around a city, with the purpose of protection from intruders (Hoehner, 369). *Mesotoichon tou phragmou* has the sense of a wall that stands in the middle of two parties (“middle wall”), intending to separate them. It is therefore commonly translated “middle wall of separation” (see NKJV) or “the barrier of the dividing wall” (NAS).

Combine this with the function of *luo* as breaking down, destroying, or freeing us from something: In his flesh, Christ has broken down the wall that stands in the middle of two parties, which intends to separate them. Also recall that *luo* can be associated with a bond that Satan holds. If Paul intends this sense of *luo*, then the middle wall that separates is a work of the devil, a bond that he holds, intending to separate two parties.

Ephesians scholar Harold Hoehner describes four common interpretations of the dividing wall (369-371):

1. The 4½ foot wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews in the temple. On this wall there was an inscription prohibiting any foreigners from entering past the wall, under penalty of death. This seems to fit the context of Jews and Gentiles being separated by a wall. However, Hoehner points out that the Jerusalem wall is never called by the designation “*mesotoichon tou phragmou*” but rather a different term (*druphaktos*) and it was still standing at the time of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
2. The curtain that separated the holy of holies from the holy place in the temple. This, however, does not fit the context as it was not a curtain (wall) between two groups of people but rather

between all people (on one side) and God (on the other). The wall in Ephesians is not between God and mankind but rather between Jews and Gentiles.

3. A cosmic wall that separates the heavens from the earth. Again, with this understanding, we have the same problem as in the second interpretation. The separation is not between the heavenly realm and people on earth, but rather between two people groups on earth, mainly Jews and Gentiles.
4. A metaphorical wall. Hoehner agrees with this interpretation, believing Paul is not referring to a literal wall at all, but rather uses “wall” as a metaphor for something that has caused division between Jews and Gentiles. Many, including Hoehner, believe this metaphorical wall represents the Mosaic Law. They point to laws such as circumcision, which created a distinct separation and therefore hostility between Jews and Gentiles. They also point to specific words in the text itself such as law (*nomos*), commandments (*entole*), and ordinances (*dogma*) (2:15). These seem to refer to the commandments and regulations given in the Torah. This is an interpretation that deserves careful examination because, if held, it has severe ramifications on how believers can live their lives. If the Mosaic Law has truly been destroyed, then it has no binding hold on those in Christ. They are free to disregard the commands given in the Torah.

As Hoehner points out, the first three interpretations do not account for the context of Ephesians. A metaphorical wall is the best explanation of the dividing wall. Yet is the wall the Mosaic Law? Could the Torah be the wall that created division and hostility between Jews and Gentiles? Does the Torah prevent unity between Jew and Gentile? Was the law broken down in Christ's flesh?

Several problems arise with such an interpretation:

1. It stands in contrast to what the Torah itself says.
2. It stands in contrast to what Jesus says.
3. It stands in contrast to what Paul says elsewhere.
4. It doesn't fully account for the Greek words used.

Let's examine each of these problems in detail.

### **Problem One: It stands in contrast to what the Torah itself says.**

Many Christians believe that the Torah made it impossible for Jews to interact with Gentiles. They think the Torah excluded Gentiles from associating with faithful Jews. It is true that many Jews attempted to keep Gentiles away; a prime example of this is the 4½ foot wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews in the temple. As Josephus said, “There was a partition made of stone ... upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that no foreigner should go within that sanctuary” (Wars, 5.5.2). Did the Torah command such a wall to be built? We will show below that this is not the case and actually

the opposite of what God commands.

Many Bible scholars teach that the Mosaic Law created division and barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles. New Testament scholar Max Turner says the following:

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.

Concerning these regulations the Letter of Aristeas (c.100 BC) maintains, the legislator [Moses] 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... worshipping the one almighty God (139) or, again, And therefore, so that we should be polluted by none nor be infected with perversions by associating with worthless persons, he has hedged us about on all sides with prescribed purifications in matters of food and drink and touch and hearing and sight (149). A literal barrier in the temple itself which prohibited Gentiles, on pain of death, from entering the inner courts where Israel worshipped, **was merely the outward expression of the Mosaic requirements** (1230, emphasis ours).

Turner states that the dividing wall in Ephesians is without question the Mosaic Law. He concludes that the wall in the temple is the outward expression of the Torah. Yet he does not show this to be the case in the Torah itself, but rather quotes the Letter of Aristeas as his source. Aristeas claims that the purpose of the law given to Moses was to keep Gentiles out and therefore keep Israelites pure. Interestingly, this is more likely a reference to the Oral Law, also believed by Jews to have been given to Moses by God, which did in fact create such a separation. Let's look at the written Torah to see if it has a similar purpose.

The Old Testament teaches the following about relationships with Gentiles and treatment of Gentiles (i.e. sojourners, strangers, aliens):

1. Gentiles are not to be oppressed, but rather cared for, supported, taken into the home, and loved even as you would love yourself.

You shall **not wrong a sojourner or oppress him**, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21, emphasis ours).

You shall **not oppress a sojourner**. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23:9, emphasis ours).

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall **not do him wrong**. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you **as the native among you**, and you shall **love him as yourself**, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:33–34, emphasis ours).

If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, **you shall support**

**him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner**, and he shall live with you (Leviticus 25:35, emphasis ours).

2. Gentiles are to be included in the Sabbath, gleanings, Torah regulations, and festivals.

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, **and the alien**, may be refreshed (Exodus 23:12, emphasis ours).

And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall **leave them for the poor and for the sojourner**: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:10, emphasis ours).

There shall be **one law for the native and for the stranger** who sojourns among you (Exodus 12:49, emphasis ours).

You shall **have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native**, for I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 24:22, emphasis ours).

And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, **the sojourner**, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, **at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there** (Deuteronomy 16:11, emphasis ours).

3. Gentiles are to be welcomed and included in the temple.

Likewise, **when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake** (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), **when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you**, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name (1 Kings 8:41–43; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:32,33, emphasis ours).

And **the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD**, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant--**these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples** (Isaiah 56:6–7, emphasis ours).

4. Gentiles are equated with widows and orphans. The implication is that Gentiles ought to be treated with the same love and care as God tells us to give to widows and orphans.

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. **He executes justice for the fatherless**

**and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt** (Deuteronomy 10:17-19, emphasis ours).

The LORD **watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless** (Psalm 146:9a, emphasis ours).

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, **against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me,**” says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:5, emphasis ours).

If the Torah itself, as well as the larger Old Testament, teaches these things, we cannot conclude with Turner that the dividing wall is the outward expression of the Mosaic requirements. Rather, the dividing wall is antithetical to the requirements of the Torah. This wall creates separation whereas God commanded inclusion and care, even so great as to bring the Gentile into your home, include him in all aspects of your life, most certainly to include worship of the One True God, and to love the stranger as you would yourself. The wall of separation that Paul refers to did just the opposite. How then can it be a metaphor for the Torah?

#### **Problem Two: It stands in contrast to what Jesus said.**

Not only does such an interpretation prove inconsistent with what the Torah teaches, but it also is contrary to what our Messiah teaches. The cross cannot break down (14) and abolish (15) the Torah because Jesus himself said he did not come to do this.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17–19).

Jesus specifically says that he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, that they will not pass away until heaven and earth themselves pass away, and that we should not teach each other to disregard or relax even the least of the commandments. That is pretty strong language. Further, when Jesus says “whoever **relaxes** one of the least of these commandments,” he uses the word “*luo*,” the same word used in Ephesians 2:14, referring to the “breaking down” of the dividing wall. If Jesus condemns those who *luo* the commandments found in the law, then how is it that he at the same time is said to *luo* the dividing wall? Jesus cannot say whoever “breaks down” (relaxes/*luo*) the commandments will be least in the kingdom, if he, the King himself, “broke down” (*luo*) these same commandments. The dividing wall cannot then refer to the law, lest Jesus' work stand in contrast with his words.

### **Problem Three: It stands in contrast to what Paul writes elsewhere.**

We might show multiple places where Paul obeys and encourages obedience to the Torah (see the section on [Galatians 3](#)). In this instance, looking at Romans 3:31 is particularly helpful because it uses some of the same words to refer to the law that Paul uses in Ephesians two. In Romans three Paul says, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Romans 3:31). The Greek word here for law is *nomos* and clearly refers to God's law (see our discussion on [Romans 3](#)). Paul asks if our faith somehow **overthrows** the law. The Greek word for overthrow is *katargeo*. *Katargeo* is also used in Ephesians 2:14-15, which states that Christ “has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing [*katargeo*] the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” In Romans, Paul asks if we abolish (*katargeo*) the Torah and responds emphatically that we do not, yet in Ephesians, he says that Christ abolished (*katargeo*) the law. How can this be? If Paul says in Romans that he does not “*katargeo*” the law, but says in Ephesians that Christ did “*katargeo*” the law, we have a contradiction. Either the law is upheld or the law is abolished, not both. It is our contention that Paul does not contradict himself, and thus the dividing wall cannot be the Law of Moses.

Examining Paul's usage of *katargeo* in other epistles (in addition to the Romans passage above) sheds light on how Paul might be using the word in Ephesians two. First Corinthians 15 is of particular significance since it includes a parallel theme to Ephesians:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he **delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying [*katargeo*] every rule and every authority and power**. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed [*katargeo*] is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:22–27a, emphasis ours).

Note the themes of kingdom and rulers and authorities in this passage. In the Corinthians passage, what is destroyed, or abolished, by Christ is every rule and every authority and power, after which Christ delivers the kingdom to God. Likewise, in Ephesians, Christ is placed high above every ruler and authority, destroying their kingdoms. When we interpret Ephesians 2:14-15, we should keep this in mind.

### **Problem Four: It doesn't fully account for the Greek words used.**

In Ephesians 2:15a, Paul says that Christ broke down the dividing wall “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.” Most understand the law of commandments expressed in ordinances to be a direct reference to the legal code of the Mosaic Law. The Greek phrase here is *τον νομον των εντολων εν δογμασιν καταργησας* (*tonnomon ton entolon en dogmasin katargesas*). *Nomon* is translated “law,” *entolon* is translated “commandments,” and *dogmasin* is translated “ordinances.”

## Nomos (Law)

*Nomos* (the dictionary form of *nomon*) is the Greek word for law. It can refer to the Torah and in many cases it does. For example, in the Matthew five passage discussed previously, Jesus refers to the Law (*nomos*) and the Prophets. However, *nomos* is not limited to the Torah but can also refer to any governing law or set of rules. In his discussion of *nomos* in *The Dictionary of New Testament Background*, scholar L.A. Jervis says the following:

The Greek word usually rendered “law” by the translators of the NT is *nomos*. This word meant both “law” and “custom” and so could refer to the laws of a society and to that society's habits and customs (632).

There are examples even within the New Testament where *nomos* does not refer to the Mosaic Law. For example, Paul refers to a *nomos* of works versus a *nomos* of faith in Romans 3:27. Here Paul uses *nomos* to point out that some are governed by works whereas others are governed by faith. Even if you think that a *nomos* of works refers to the Mosaic Law (which is contrary to what the Mosaic Law itself says – see our discussion on [Romans 9-11](#)), you must admit that there is an additional *nomos* of faith. They cannot both refer to the Mosaic Law, but they can each refer to a governing set of rules.

Similarly, in Romans 8:2, Paul refers to the *nomos* of sin and death, which is juxtaposed against the *nomos* of the Spirit of life. One law is based on a government (if you will) of sin and death, the other based on a government of the Spirit. Clearly Paul understood that *nomos* does not have to refer to the Mosaic Law. He sometimes used it in different ways. Might he have done so in Ephesians 2:15?

Also, in extra-biblical sources, *nomos* does not necessarily refer to the Torah. For example, Josephus refers to a “*nomos* of war” (War 3:363) and a “*nomos* of nature” (War 3:374). Even within Judaism, *nomos* does not refer simply to the Torah, but can also refer to the entire Hebrew Bible. Further, *nomos* can refer to the “two branches of divine revelation—the written Torah and the oral Torah, which are traditionally viewed as having been given to Moses on Mt. Sinai” (Grossfeld, 1242). The oral Torah is separate from the first five books of the Bible. These are extra laws that were set in place by the Pharisees after the return from the Babylonian exile to prevent Israel from going into exile once again. They functioned as a fence to prevent Israel from disobeying the Torah. These laws were by nature more restrictive than the Torah. The idea was that if these were not disobeyed, then the Torah would not be disobeyed. Initially given orally, they were later written down and collected in the Talmud. When Jews refer to the Torah, they are often including the Oral Law.

When we read *nomos*, we have to keep all these usages and emphases in mind. Can it refer to the written law given to Moses on Sinai? Absolutely! Can it also refer to the extra laws that have been added by Rabbis in the form of the Oral Law? Certainly! And can *nomos* simply refer to any set of rules that govern a person or group of people? An emphatic yes! In fact, we see in the examples from Romans above that we can be governed by a *nomos* that is completely antithetical and contradictory to God's *nomos* (i.e. the law of works; the law of sin and death).

## **Entole (Commandments)**

*Entole* is the root word of *entolon*, which is translated “commandments” in Ephesians 2:15. Like *nomos*, it can refer to commandments found in the Mosaic Law, yet it can also refer to commandments given by others. Its usage is not limited to the Torah. BDAG describes *entole* as either 1) an order authorizing a specific action (like a warrant) or 2) a mandate or ordinance (340). An example of the first usage is in John 11:57 when the chief priests and Pharisees give orders (*entolas*) that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should inform the leaders so they could arrest him. These orders clearly do not refer to God's commands given to Moses. The second sense would include references to commandments given to Moses by God. However, it could also include commandments that were not of divine origin. For example, in Titus 1:14, Paul refers to the commands (*entolais*) of those who turn away from the truth. Here, Paul uses a form of *entole* in a way that does not refer to the commandments of God given to Moses. So again we ask, might Paul use *entole* in a similar way in Ephesians 2:15? At the very least, we must be open to the possibility.

## **Dogma (Ordinances)**

*Dogma* is the root word of *dogmasin*, translated “ordinances” in Ephesians 2:15. Many understand this to be a reference to the regulations of the Mosaic Law. However, outside of Ephesians two and Colossians two, every time *dogma* is used in the New Testament (Luke 2:1, Acts 16:4, and 17:7), it refers to a decree made by a person or group of people, not to God's laws. *Dogma* is also used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and non-biblical contemporary sources (e.g. the writings of Josephus). In the vast majority of these occurrences, *dogma* again refers to decrees made by men. In a few of these instances, *dogma* may refer to God's law (e.g. 4 Maccabees 10:2; Against Apion 1.8), though it is not the normal usage. Therefore, just as with *nomos* and *entole*, we should not assume that *dogma* refers to the Torah. In fact, we should lean toward its normal usage as a reference to decrees of man. Context, of course, will be the determining factor. Thus in Ephesians, we ask, “How did Paul understand and use *dogma*?” In our discussion of [Colossians 2](#), we show how Paul used *dogma* (and its related forms) to refer to man-made rules, regulations, and traditions. In Colossians 2:20-22, he says that these regulations are according to human precepts and teachings. At the very least, then, in Ephesians we must consider the possibility that *dogma* means something other than the Torah. Further, if we are going to be consistent with the historical and biblical usage of *dogma*, including Paul's usage of it in Colossians, we see strong evidence that *dogma* refers to decrees of men.

Paul says Christ abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances. We know that *nomos* and *entole* do not exclusively refer to the Mosaic Law and can even refer to laws and commands that are antithetical to God's commands. Likewise, *dogma* normally refers to decrees made by man, and was used by Paul in Colossians in this very way. Therefore, we cannot say that “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” necessarily refers to the Mosaic Law, when in so many instances these words do not refer to the Mosaic Law.

## Ephesians 2:14-15 Part 2

### The Dividing Wall: A Second Look

Many interpret the dividing wall as a picture of the Mosaic Law, which in their view served to separate Jews from Gentiles. We have shown four major problems with this interpretation. First, the Torah teaches to intimately include and care for Gentiles, not separate from them. Second, Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Mosaic Law, yet we know he abolished the dividing wall. Third, in Romans Paul says we do not abolish the Mosaic Law but rather uphold it, so how can he say that it is abolished and not upheld in Ephesians? Fourth, the Greek words *nomos* and *entole* do not have to refer to the Mosaic Law and its commandments, and the word *dogma* normally refers to rules and regulations that are of man-made origin. With these in mind, we simply cannot accept an interpretation that sees the Mosaic Law as the dividing wall. So then, what is the dividing wall? And what is the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that Christ abolished?

Let's return to what we know from the passage.

Based on these verses, we know:

1. Christ broke down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.
2. This was accomplished by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.
3. The result is unity and peace between believing Jews and Gentiles.

The dividing wall separated Jews from Gentiles. If the Mosaic Law did not create separation between Jews and Gentiles, what did? Let's look again at the context that we spent so much time examining initially. Remember that in Ephesians, Paul has painted a picture of two kingdoms. These kingdoms are antithetical, opposing each other. The citizens of one kingdom are members of the household of God (2:19); the citizens of the other kingdom follow the prince of the power of the air and are sons of disobedience (2:2). Paul associates Jews with the first kingdom, those who have the covenants of promise, are part of the commonwealth of Israel, and are “near” (2:12-13). He associates Gentiles with the second kingdom, those who have been separated and alienated from God, without hope; those who are “far off;” those who walk in darkness and are ignorant (2:11-13; 4:17-19).

With this in mind, Paul mentions a great mystery (1:10; 3:6)—that those who were formerly members of Satan's kingdom have been brought into God's kingdom, that those who were far off have been brought near, that those who were separated and alienated are now included. As Paul says in Colossians 1:13, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his

beloved Son.” The result is unity between those who were already near and those who are now included: Jews and Gentiles. All of this was accomplished by the death of our Messiah.

Now that believing Gentiles “in the flesh” have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel (2:12,19), they receive the fullness of the Abrahamic blessing: they are adopted as sons of Abraham, and ultimately sons of God, and now have an inheritance in him.

This brings us back to the theme of “rulers and authorities.” The defeat of these rulers is essential to understanding Ephesians and the dividing wall. Recall that the rulers and authorities were demonic beings who had governing authority over the nations, the Gentiles. In other words, they are the rulers (under Satan) of the other kingdom.

Paul says the dividing wall is a wall of hostility. The Greek word for hostility is ἐχθραν (*echthran*). It is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 3:15, when God says there will be enmity, or hostility, between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman. In Ephesians, the Gentiles were called the children (i.e. offspring) of Satan, whereas those who are part of God's kingdom are children (offspring) of God. All the way back to Genesis three, there has been hostility between those who are of God's kingdom and those who are not. And ultimately, there is hostility between those who are not God's children and God himself. Thus in Romans 8:7, Paul can say that those whose minds are set on gratifying the flesh have hostility (*echthra*) towards God. In James 4:4, James says that friendship with the world (i.e. Satan's kingdom) is hostility (*echthra*) with God.

The dividing wall of hostility is a wall of division, division that has existed between two kingdoms, that still exists between these two kingdoms until Satan's rule is ultimately destroyed (Revelation 11:15). So if the hostility between the two kingdoms still exists, how is it that Christ destroyed the wall of hostility in his flesh?

Paul is addressing Gentiles **in the flesh** who have aligned themselves with the one true God. They have forsaken any prior allegiances to the rulers and authorities. As previous members of Satan's kingdom, they used to be against those who were a part of God's kingdom, those who “were near,” and vice versa. But now, there is no longer a wall of hostility between them. Why? Because the Gentiles who have been united with Christ are now friends of God, part of his kingdom, and enemies of the kingdom to which they once belonged.

It's not that hostility no longer exists between the two kingdoms. It is rather that hostility no longer exists between believers who have been united in Christ, whether they are Gentiles in the flesh or Jews in the flesh. They are all spiritually children of the God of Israel.

### **What is the dividing wall?**

The dividing wall is the hostility that exists between the children of Satan (in one kingdom) and the

children of God (in another kingdom). For believers in the Messiah, this hostility no longer exists because they are now in the **same** kingdom. Though it once stood tall and mighty, there is now no longer a wall of hostility between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

### **How did abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances achieve this?**

Remember that *nomos* (law) can refer to any governing law or set of rules, and *entole* (commandments) can refer to any mandate or ordinance, not necessarily of divine origin. Recall also that dogma (ordinances/regulations) normally refers to man-made commands, not God's commands. In Colossians, Paul directly connects certain dogma with demonic rulers who inspire these man-made rules that are contrary to God's rules (2:8,20).

In this context, therefore, the law of commandments expressed in ordinances is the governing law of the rulers and authorities over the Gentiles (nations). This “law” was their rule, their authority, their claim over and boundary around the citizens of their kingdom. Such laws would naturally enforce separation between its citizens and those of God's kingdom. Why? Because a major goal of Satan is to maintain ownership of his subjects and keep them far away from the one true King.

Under this interpretation, *nomos* would be how the rulers and authorities exerted and maintained their power. Their laws, commandments, and ordinances contradict and stand against the Word of God. Yet these very rules have been negated because Jesus is above all rule and authority (1:20-21). Moreover, those who have been raised with Christ are seated with him above all rule and authority (Ephesians 2:6). Thus, the law of Satan's kingdom has been made powerless. It has no authority over those who have been raised with Christ, who are now a part of his kingdom. If you were once a citizen of a certain country, but are no longer, the constitution of that country no longer applies to you. Similarly, the “constitution” of the kingdom of darkness no longer applies to those who are of the kingdom of light. They have been raised above it, seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

### **What would the laws, commandments, and dogmas of Satan's kingdom look like, practically speaking?**

As mentioned above, a major goal of the kingdom of darkness that rules over the Gentiles would be to keep the Gentiles out of the kingdom of light. Thus, its rules would intend to separate the nations from God and Israel, to prevent allegiance to the one true King, to maintain rule and authority over the nations. Its rules would generate hostility, the dividing wall that Jesus tore down. That is why abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances resulted in the destruction of the dividing wall.

These laws, commandments, and ordinances would manifest themselves in lies and false beliefs. Examples would be false religious systems, both monotheistic and polytheistic, or even atheistic. Such “laws” create false beliefs that make it more difficult for Gentiles to convert, to recognize the truth of

God's kingdom. These religious systems have historically brought separation between God's people and the nations.

These demon-inspired regulations manifest themselves in belief systems of the nations. They are expressed in anti-Semitic laws, hatred of the Jews, false gods, and false beliefs. Even the inclusive polytheistic Greeks and Romans were intolerant of (and thus separated from) the monotheistic Jews. Similarly today we have postmodernists, who claim to embrace all religions, yet show intolerance towards believers in Christ.

What we must understand is that these are the laws, rules, and regulations that have been nailed to the cross, destroyed by the death of our Messiah. He was able to destroy these rules because when he died, he destroyed the power of the rulers and authorities, making a spectacle of them (Colossians 2:15).

Interestingly, these regulations have not only manifested themselves in the nations, but also in some of the man-made rules of the Jews. Satan is fighting the fight on both sides. On the side of the nations, he has instilled false religious systems and hatred toward God's people. On the side of the Jews, he seeks to create hatred for the foreigners, the Gentiles, whom God commands his covenant people love and care for.

Expressions of these man-made rules are in Jewish teachings such as the Oral Law and writings such as the Qumran's 4QMMT (see our discussion on [Galatians 2](#)), which command separation from Gentiles. For example, Jubilees 22:16 says,

And you also, my son Jacob, remember my words, and keep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable.

Here is a command to separate from Gentiles and not even eat with them. Not only is such a command not given in the Torah, it is actually contrary to God's law, which commands the Israelites to love, support, and include foreigners. Jesus himself, referring to the Oral Law, says,

**So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.** You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**" (Matthew 15:6-9, emphasis ours; cf. Isaiah 29:13-14).

Such teachings make void the very Word of God. Yet, through Christ's death, he has turned the tables and made void these commandments of men.

The result is the destruction of the dividing wall, the tearing down of hostility between Gentiles in the flesh and Jews in the flesh, who are now united as brothers and sisters in the Spirit. Destroying God's commands does not accomplish this. Rather, destroying the governing rules of Satan's kingdom brings

unity between God's people.

### **What is the relationship between the dividing wall in Ephesians two and the *cheirographon* in Colossians two?**

We have already stated that Ephesians and Colossians are sister texts with many related themes. In our study of [Colossians](#), we carefully examine the Greek term *cheirographon*, often translated “record of indebtedness.” In Colossians two, Paul uses *cheirographon* to refer to a bond created by our own voluntary submission to the rulership of demonic beings. The spiritual rulers and authorities held over us this note of indebtedness, which said that we belonged to them. As Paul states in Colossians 2:14-15, this note was nailed to the cross, which disarmed the rulers and authorities.

Recall also that when we were under the rulers and authorities, they instituted dogmas over us. These dogmas, the rules and regulations of the demonic realm, generate hostility between God's people and those who belong to the prince of the power of the air. This hostility is a wall of division between Jews and Gentiles, the dividing wall Paul speaks of in Ephesians two. When Christ died, the *cheirographon* was nailed to the cross; it was annulled, which then terminated the rules and regulations to which we previously submitted.

In both Colossians and Ephesians, the authorities are disarmed and their rules and regulations are rendered powerless as Christ loosens their hold on us. He forgives us of the idolatrous *cheirographon* we voluntarily submitted to. Furthermore, the Father raised Christ and placed him above every rule and authority. Christ cancels their right to rule us, which frees us to serve the living God and walk according to his commandments.

In summary, on the cross, Christ annulled the *cheirographon*, freeing us from our obligation to follow the rules and regulations that created the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, who are now united under one kingdom and one King.

### **How does this affect believers today?**

The bottom line is, **we must be careful not to rebuild the wall that Christ has destroyed.** We cannot bring with us the man-made traditions that are contrary to God's Word when we enter the Body of the Messiah. Both Jewish and Gentile believers must be on guard against this, even in the simplest of ways. Consider when believers eat together, sharing table fellowship. Jewish believers may bring with them the rabbinic teaching that meat and milk products should not be eaten together (Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 113b,115b). This might offend a Gentile believer who loves his cheeseburger. Since this teaching is outside of scripture, we must not let it build a wall of hostility between believers. On the flip side, a Gentile may delight in adding bacon to his burger. Eating pork is against the Torah, is contrary to God's instructions, and would greatly offend a Jewish believer. It would rebuild the wall that Christ has destroyed.

Being careful not to rebuild the wall of hostility applies to situations and issues far more serious than table fellowship. When Gentiles come to faith, they have a tendency to bring their pagan customs and traditions with them and “Christianize” them. Such “customs” include worship practices that find their origin outside of the scriptures, originating in pagan polytheism and/or naturalism. They hold beliefs that we can worship how we want, eat what we want, and live how we want, as long as we do it in the name of Christ. Jews would rightly see these practices as idolatry, even when done in Christ's name, thus creating separation between the two groups.

Likewise, when Jews come to faith, they must be on guard against an attitude of superiority. There are far too many Messianic congregations where Gentile believers feel they are second class members. Perhaps they are new to learning about the Torah or know little of the Hebrew language. Unlike their Jewish brothers and sisters, they have not had years of experience celebrating the richness of the Sabbath and God's festivals. They are told they don't fully understand. Of course, this results in division and feelings of inferiority. The middle wall that Christ tore down in his flesh is thus rebuilt. Hegg, addressing the issue of Jewish elitism in Messianic congregations, exhorts his readers with the following:

We dare not rebuild a wall between Jew and Gentile that was removed by the very work of our Messiah. Thus, we must be careful to maintain the biblical mandates, but equally careful not to divide over man-made traditions (15).

May this be true of us.

### **How did Christ's death destroy the dividing wall?**

One last issue must be addressed. Paul says that Christ destroyed the dividing wall in his flesh (2:14). “In his flesh” refers to the sacrificial death of our Messiah on the cross. We know that, on the cross, Jesus took our place, paying the price for our sins. If his death accomplished our forgiveness and redemption, what does this have to do with the negating of the rulers and authorities' dominion over our lives?

Remember that “*luo*” (broke down) refers to the breaking of a bond. We gave examples of this word associated with a bond of Satan being broken and the works of the devil being destroyed (Luke 13:16; 1 John 3:8). In a different example, John says we have been “loosed” (*luo*) from our sins and made into a kingdom (Revelation 1:5-6).

The connection between the cross and the rulers and authorities is our sin. Our sin, which separated us from God, is what gave Satan (and thereby the rulers and authorities) ownership over our lives. When our sin was not atoned for, we belonged to Satan, to the other kingdom. On the cross, Christ atoned for our sin and thereby destroyed the very thing that gave Satan claim over us. Christ destroyed (*luo*)

Satan's hold on those who were his inheritance by dealing with our sin. Pauline scholar Clinton E. Arnold, in his book, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters*, says the following in reference to the disarming of the rulers and authorities in Colossians 2:15:

How did Christ's death and resurrection accomplish this disarming? Precisely because the powers could not deter Christ from making a satisfaction for sin. By offering his life and spilling his blood, Christ could extend forgiveness of sin to his people. The powers thus lost their chief mechanism for holding people in their bondage (104-5).

In both Colossians and Ephesians, the authorities are disarmed and their rules and regulations are rendered powerless because Christ loosens their hold on us by forgiving us of our sin and reconciling us to the Father.

In Ephesians, Paul reminds us that we are not to give the devil a “foothold” once again by sinning (Ephesians 4:27). Satan achieves this “foothold,” which can also be translated “opportunity” or “position,” through our sin. Christ has released us from Satan's hold because he has dealt with our sin on the cross. We are to live accordingly and not give Satan any opportunity or position in our lives yet again (cf. Romans 6:10-14).

This is not to say that the dividing wall is our sin. As we have already established, the wall is the hostility that exists between the two kingdoms. When Christ, in his flesh, dealt with our sin, he destroyed Satan's hold on us, released us from his kingdom, and removed the hostility, that is, the dividing wall, between us and the people of God. As Paul says in Colossians,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, **having forgiven us all our trespasses**, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us **with its legal demands [dogmas]**. This he set aside, **nailing it to the cross**. He **disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him** (2:13–15, emphasis ours).

Sin puts us under the rulers and authorities, who rule over us with *dogmas* that create hostility between its citizens and God's kingdom. On the cross, Christ forgave us of our sin and destroyed the *dogmas* of the rulers and authorities.

## Conclusion

Many Christians interpret the dividing wall of Ephesians two as the Mosaic Law, believing that it has created division between Jews and Gentiles. We have shown that this is a misunderstanding based on a gross misrepresentation of the Torah. Such an interpretation has major flaws: it is inconsistent with the Torah itself, with the words of Jesus, and with the words of Paul in other letters. Further, it does not consider varying uses of the Greek words used in Ephesians two for “law” and “commandments,” and is not compatible with the normal understanding of the Greek word for “ordinances” (*dogma*), which does not refer to God's laws but rather human edicts and decrees.

Since the dividing wall is clearly not the Torah, what is it? The context of Ephesians paints the picture of two kingdoms, one ruled by Satan, the other by God. Paul's message is that Gentiles who have accepted Jesus as their Messiah no longer belong to Satan's kingdom, but rather to God's. We must understand the dividing wall in this context. Since the fall of man, hostility has existed between the offspring of Satan (citizens of his kingdom) and the offspring of God (citizens of God's kingdom). When Gentiles in the flesh become spiritual children of God, this hostility is removed because their citizenship has been transferred to God's kingdom. They are no longer against God's children but rather included and united with them. Christ broke down the dividing wall.

When Christ was obedient to death on the cross, he was given a name above all names and raised high above all rulers and authorities (Philippians 2:8-9; Ephesians 1:20-21). Therefore, he was able to effectively abolish (*luo*) all of their laws, commandments, and regulations that previously controlled their former citizens. These laws, commandments, and regulations were designed to separate the citizens of the two kingdoms, to keep the citizens of Satan's kingdom far away from God and his truth. These laws consisted of lies, false beliefs, and hateful doctrines. When Christ was raised above the rulers and authorities, these laws were abolished (cf. Colossians 2:15), and the hostility they created was destroyed. Now, we are no longer slaves of sin, of the kingdom of Satan, following Satan's laws, commandments, and regulations; we have been released to be slaves of righteousness and slaves of God, now to follow God's commandments (Romans 6:18-22, cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Because of the cross, our sins have been forgiven.

Because of the cross, we are now citizens of God's kingdom.

Because of the cross, the laws of Satan's kingdom hold no sway over us.

Because of the cross, the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been utterly destroyed, and we are now united in the Messiah as citizens of the same kingdom. We are unified as one people under the same law, the Torah of God.

And so we close with where we began:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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 (Ephesians 2:14-15).

Hallelujah!

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