

great ingathering of Israel and all who are joined to Israel through faith in the Messiah Yeshua.

Here, in one phrase, Paul shows the utter continuity of God's plan of salvation as prophesied through the divine covenants with Israel, and accomplished by the Promised One.

having no hope and without God in the world. – Here Paul concludes his description with a line that encompasses all unbelievers, Jew and Gentile alike. This reiterates what he has taught us in the previous paragraph, and he no doubt brings this as the conclusion of his list in order to show the bounty of God's love and grace to those who are saved.

Now, in the following verses, he will show how Jew and Gentile believers share equally in the body of the Messiah, all being equal recipients of God's sovereign love and grace in Yeshua.

13 But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah.

Paul has previously cataloged the woeful condition of those who were outside of God's family. Now he describes them as being "far off" from the divine revelation given to Israel through her prophets. But he breaks the chain of despair with the opening words "But now..." These opening words herald a symphony of God's sovereign grace breaking into the hopeless lives of those who were "without Messiah," "strangers to the covenants of the promise," and thus "having no hope" and "without God" in the world. The "now" (νυνὶ, *nuni*) is in stark contrast to "formerly" or "then" (ποτέ, *pote*) in v. 11. This highlights the biblical teaching of regeneration, that work of the Ruach by which the one called to salvation is awakened and brought to life spiritually, enabled to exercise saving faith in the person and saving work of Yeshua. This brings about the assurance of sins forgiven and the spiritual ability to put to death the deeds of the flesh so as to grow in ways of righteousness, being conformed to the very person of Yeshua Himself.

And Paul gives the very foundation of this grace by reiterating the fountain from which God's grace flows, that is, the very person and work of our Messiah Yeshua. Thus he begins with reminding us all that God's grace has come to us "in Messiah," emphasizing that the believer has been brought into union with Him. Through faith in Him, we are reckoned by the Father as having died with Him and to have likewise risen with Him unto a new life—a life which is eternal and which cannot be taken away.

you who formerly were far off... – Paul continues to make his address particularly to the Gentile believers, in order to emphasize the unity

within the *ekklesia*, the body of Messiah. The pronoun “you” is repeated from v. 11, “remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh...” Here Paul characterizes the unbelieving Gentiles as “formerly far off” (οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν) and makes the clear contrast that now, “in Messiah Yeshua,” they have been “brought near (ἐγενήθητε ἐγγύς) by the blood of Messiah,” i.e., by His sacrificial death for those whom He would save.

This same language, of “near” and “far,” is used in the Tanach to describe the “nations” as “far off” in contrast to the people of Israel who are seen as “near.”

Adonai will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand.... (Deut 28:49)

Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake... (1Ki 8:41)

Israel, on the other hand, is seen as “near.”

And He has lifted up a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise Adonai! (Ps 148:14)

How are we to understand this metaphor of “far” and “near”? It undoubtedly refers to the divine revelation given to Israel by the prophets, the very means by which the revelation of God Himself, His plan of salvation, and the teaching of His righteous ways by which His people are blessed and enabled to be witnesses of His glory. To a great extent, the prophets were sent to Israel and not to the nations. Jonah, quite obviously, is an exception, being sent to Ninevah, the great city of Assyria.

While there were clearly Gentiles who came into contact with Israel, heard the message of the prophets, and joined themselves to the God of Israel, it was not until the coming of Yeshua as the incarnate One promised by the prophets that the harvest of the nations began in earnest. This was Yeshua’s commission to the disciples before His ascension, that they should make disciples of all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem and expanding out to the farthest reaches of the world (Matt 28:19–20). It is clear that the outpouring of the Ruach at the Shavuot following Yeshua’s ascension was the divine enablement to reach the nations with the Gospel, as evidenced by the supernatural gift of languages given to the Apostles on that occasion.

Thus, it was the very purpose of Messiah's death and resurrection that brought about the fulfilling of the Gospel given to Abraham (cf. Gal 3:8), that in the Seed of Abraham, i.e., the Messiah (cf. Gal 3:16), all the nations or families of the earth would be blessed. While the Gentile nations were distanced from the revelation of the Gospel given by Israel's prophets, now they were no longer "far off," for the Gospel would go to all the nations, bringing them face to face with the truth of God's unspeakable gift of salvation to all who would believe.

Note carefully that Paul does not say that "you who were formerly far off have come near." In fact, the Greek is quite emphatic that those who were far off *have been brought* near, and the Greek verb translated as "have been brought" is γίνουμαι (*ginomai*), an aorist passive verb. This verb can carry the sense of an "event" or "something that takes place," but it is also the common verb meaning "come into being," "be born," "to exist," etc. The point that should be emphasized is that Paul describes the Gentiles coming to faith as the result of God's calling them and enabling them to hear His call, not as something the lost sinner accomplishes on his or her own power.

brought near by the blood of Messiah – The whole of God's grace flows from the vicarious atonement procured by the death of Messiah as payment for the sins of all who would be saved. Apart from the substitutionary atonement which Yeshua's death accomplished, there could be no salvation for Jew or for Gentile. This is precisely what Yeshua emphasizes when He stated:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn 14:6)

Thus it must be understood that to be "brought near" is not only to be brought near to the truth of the Gospel through the revelation of God's word, but also to be brought near to God Himself through union with the Messiah and the work of the indwelling Ruach. This is the glorious work of our loving and sovereign Lord and Savior, Who died so that we might be brought to Him.

Here, once again, we see quite clearly that in the Scriptures, the death of Yeshua is a real payment for sin, not a potential payment to which something must be added in order that it should be effectual. We are brought near to God "by means of the blood of Messiah." His death for sinners made their salvation inevitable, not merely possible.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

For He Himself is our peace – The addition of the personal pronoun “Himself” in the NASB is an attempt to signal the emphatic nature of Paul’s statement. The verb alone would have been sufficient for the statement, for the verb “to be” (ἐστίν, *estin*) means “he is,” thus, “He is our peace” would have stated the fact. But that Paul adds the personal pronoun ἑαυτὸς (*autos*) as the first element of the sentence makes it clear that Paul’s meaning is: “For He and He alone is our peace.” Here once again the fact is emphasized that right standing with God the Father can only come about by being in union with Yeshua and thus being reckoned as having died with Him and risen with Him to a new life.¹ Thus, “peace with God” is only possible if one has exercised faith in Yeshua, that the penalty for sin has been paid by His infinite sacrifice and that a new life has begun which, empowered by the indwelling Spirit, is able to have eternal communion with God and to live to honor and glorify Him. Here “peace” is the Hebrew *shalom*, which envisions not only a cessation of hostility but also “well-being,” the comfort of that which is right, wholesome, loving, and accepting. Those who are “in Messiah” need no longer fear that they will ever be rejected by the Father, but will always be welcomed into His presence, for even as the Father blesses the Son, so His blessing is upon all who are in His Son.

Who made both groups into one... – The Greek simply has “Who made the both one” (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἓν). The English “Who made” translates an aorist participle. Though the aorist tense in this case does not help in defining the sort of action described, it is interesting that Paul does not use a present participle here, which could have put emphasis upon the current priestly work of Yeshua in the heavenlies. But in utilizing the aorist, Paul seems clearly to be point back to what he stated previously, that the sinner has been brought near “by the blood of Messiah.” Thus, it was by the efficacious nature of His death that the two groups have been made into one. Such unity is viewed by Paul as the inevitable and necessary consequences of Yeshua’s sacrificial death. To deny such unity is thus likewise to deny the efficacy of the cross.

The two groups are doubtlessly the group that is “near” and the one that is “far,” namely the Jew and the Gentile believers. As Hagner notes:

1 Cf. Eph 2:6; Rom 6:1–7; Col 2:12.

...“the both” refer to the two parties, systems, or classes under which the Jews and the Gentiles were grouped and which God made one.¹

This is confirmed by the fact that the word “one” (ἓν, *hen*) is in the neuter gender, and this is a function of the Greek neuter in some cases.

The neuter is sometimes used with reference to persons if it is not the individuals but a general quality that is to be emphasized.²

Here we see the groundwork for what Paul will emphasize in the coming verses, namely, that Jew and Gentile believers share the same glorious benefits and responsibilities of God’s salvation, since both have been equally adopted into the family of God as sons and daughters redeemed by the blood of Yeshua.

and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances... –

This statement of the Apostle Paul has been used by many to teach that in the death of Yeshua, the Law, i.e., the Torah given to Moses, was abolished and therefore no longer has a functioning aspect in the lives of those redeemed by Yeshua’s blood. But this is clearly not what Paul is teaching here.

The opening line makes the remarkable statement that Yeshua “broke down” the dividing wall. The Greek term translated “broke down” is λύω (*luō*) which can carry the sense of “to loose,” “untie,” “set free,” “break up,” “destroy,” “bring to an end,” “abolish,” or “do away with.”³ It is used of demolition of buildings, as in the famous saying of Yeshua regarding the Temple (John 2:19) or of the destruction of the ship on which Paul was traveling (Acts 27:41). *BDAG* lists our text under the heading “break up,” “destroy,” “tear down.” Ephesians 2:16 further defines the use of λύω (*luō*) by adding ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ, “having put to death the enmity in (by) him (it).” Contextually, the abolishing action is viewed as final—as a death. Thus, the barrier is done away

1 Hagner, *Ephesians*, p. 368.

2 Blass, DeBrunner, Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Univ of Chicago, 1961), §138, p. 76.

3 *BDAG*, p. 484-5.

with forever.¹

καταργέω (*katargeō*), the term translated “abolishing” (NASB), describing what Yeshua did to the “enmity” between Jew and Gentile, usually means “to render void,” “make ineffective, powerless,” “abolish,” “wipe out,” or “set aside,” and is used in the context of rendering laws or edicts of no more effect.² It may have been in the mind of the Apostle that while the dividing wall was destroyed (λύω, *luō*), the enmity found in the “law of commandments contained in ordinances” was simply rendered ineffective, though still existing.

The object of the verb λύω (*luō*, “to destroy”) is τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ, “the dividing wall of the barrier.” But what is this dividing wall? μεσότοιχος (*mesotoichos*) is found only here in the Apostolic Writings and does not appear in the Lxx, so further definition must be sought outside of the biblical text. The word has been found in two inscriptions in the sense of “partition” or “barrier.”³

The genitive τοῦ φραγμου (*tou fragmou*) is appositional: “the barrier consisting of the fence.” φραγμός (*fragmos*, “fence”) is found three other times in the Apostolic Writings (Matt 21:33; Mk 12:1; Lk 14:23), all with the sense of “fence.” The Lxx uses the term with this same meaning. Note Sirach 36:25, “Where there is no hedge (φραγμός, *fragmos*) a vineyard is plundered; where there is no wife, a man wanders about in misery.”

Some commentators have assumed the barrier spoken of in our text is the wall which separated the Gentile and Jewish courts in the Temple. It is true that Josephus uses the phrase ὁ μέσος τοῖχος *ho mesos toixos* (“the middle wall”) to describe the inner wall of the Temple, but the balustrade preventing Gentiles and unclean-Israelites from proceeding into the court of the Jews was never so designated, nor is it labeled φραγμός (*fragmos*) by any ancient writer. Furthermore, in the inscription engraved on the balustrade itself, the wall is referred to by a different term:

1 The compound form (*καταλύω*, *kataluō*) is used in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think I am come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” The compound form is probably intensive or perfective, in the sense of “utterly destroy,” see Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (UBS, 1988), 1.234 who show that λύω and καταλύω fall into close semantic ranges.

2 BDAG, p. 418

3 Carl Schneider, “μεσότοιχον” (*mesotoichon*) in TDNT, 4.625.

No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade (δρύφακτου, *drufaktou*) around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death.¹

If Paul had intended his readers to understand the retaining wall of the Temple which separated Gentile from Jew to be what Messiah destroyed, he would have used the common Greek term, something he doubtlessly had seen time and time again as he entered the Temple. Josephus calls the separating wall in the Temple court δρύφακτος λιθινός (*druphaktos lithinos*), “fence of stone,” employing the same term used in the inscription, and describes the wall as three cubits high (1.5 meters; 4.5 feet) with gates. Philo also calls the wall δρύφακτος (*drufaktos*) not μεσότοιχος (*mesotoichos*) or φραγμός (*fragmos*), the words of our text. The Mishnah and Bavli refer to the balustrade by the term ירִיב , (*soreg*), “lattice-work fence.”

Moreover, the aorist participle λύσας (*lusas* from *luō*), as well as the context, would most clearly require that the breaking down of the wall had already taken place. But until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, this partition wall remained. It seems unlikely that Paul would teach the present reality of peace between Jew and Gentile on the basis of Messiah’s having abolished the separating wall in the Temple if, in fact, it was still standing!

1 Quoted from E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE—66CE* (Trinity Press International, 1992), p. 61. The inscription along with the history of its recovery has been published in Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Baker, 1978 reprint), p. 80, where Deissmann has τρύφακτου (*trufaktou*) rather than δρύφακτου, *drufakto*. Liddel and Scott list only δρύφακτου, *drufakto*, noting that τρύφακτου (*trufaktou*) is an erroneous form. See also Peretz Segal, “The Penalty of the Warning Inscription from the Temple of Jerusalem,” *IEJ* 39, 1989, pp. 79-84.

Ant. xv.417; cf. War 5.193f; 6.124-6. The Bavli notes that these gates were closed up, cf. b.Yoma 16a.