

channel through whom the glorious message of the Gospel would be proclaimed to the nations.

19–20 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Messiah Yeshua Himself being the corner stone,

In v. 12 of our chapter, Paul refers to the Gentile believers as formerly being “strangers to the covenants of the promise.” Here Paul adds the term “alien” (πάροικος, *paroikos*) to the word “strangers.” This word, linked with the term “strangers” (ξένος, *ksenos*), gives the picture of those in a given city or region who do not have full privileges or status when compared to those who are “fellow citizens” (συμπολίτης, *sympolitēs*) or those of a “household” or “family” (οἰκεῖος, *oikeios*). Regarding these terms utilized by Paul, Thielman notes:

These four terms were commonly used in social and political contexts to refer to a particular group’s status, and ξένοι [*strangers*] and πάροικοι [*alien*] were frequently contrasted with πολῖται [*citizen*] or οἰκεῖοι [*household*]. Ancient lists of city residents, for example, ranked the privileges of full citizens (πολίται) first, resident aliens (πάροικοι or κάτοικοι, *katoikoi*) next, and transient foreigners (ξένοι) last.¹

The status of all believers is that each one, regardless of people group identification, gender, economic status, etc., have equal access to the Father and are equally positioned as bone fide members of God’s household. As children of the King, no one can deny access to Him for those He has brought into His family through the blood of His Son, our Messiah, Yeshua, and the application of His grace to all who are His through the agency of the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh.

Here, Paul is speaking specifically to Gentile believers who were viewed as “strangers” or “outsiders” by the unbelieving Jewish community. He emphasizes that having come into the family of God through faith in Yeshua, they are now “fellow citizens with the saints.” The word “saints” (ἅγιοι, *hagioi*) refers to those who have been declared “righteous” or “holy” by God because, through faith in Messiah, His righteousness has been reckoned or accredited to them for He paid

¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 179.

for their sins by having died for them and thus taking the penalty of their sin upon Himself. Thus, Paul is using the term *hagioi* (translated as “saints” but more literally “holy ones”) to mean those who are set apart to God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. This is how Paul uses the term throughout this epistle¹ and elsewhere.² Unfortunately, in the history of Roman Catholicism, the word “saint” was applied to individuals within the Roman church who had died and who were viewed as “glorified saints” raised to heaven along with the heavenly angels. But this is not at all how Paul uses the term. Throughout Ephesians, the word simply means those who, by God’s grace and through the infinite sacrifice of Yeshua on their behalf, have been declared righteous on the basis of faith in Messiah, even as Abraham believed.

And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”
And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Then he believed in ADONAI, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:5–6)

The Hebrew of Gen 15:6 is clear: **וְהֵאֱמַן בְּיְהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה**, “And he believed in ADONAI, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” The word translated “it” in the phrase “reckoned it to him as righteousness” is the objective pronoun attached to the verb “reckoned” and this pronoun is in the feminine gender. So if one asks “what was reckoned to him as righteousness?”, the answer can only be Abraham’s faith, for in the Hebrew the word “faith” **אֱמוּנָה** (*emunah*), is feminine in gender and nothing else in the phrase from Gen 15:6 is in the feminine gender to which the “it” could refer.³

Thus, when Paul in our Ephesians text refers to the Gentile believers as “fellow citizens with the saints,” he is emphasizing that all believers whether Jew or non-Jew, are equally received by God as those He has declared to be “holy” in His sight. Yeshua’s payment for their sin

1 1:1, 15, 18; 3:8; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18.

2 *ἅγιος* as denoting believers in Yeshua as “holy ones” is found 39 times in the Pauline epistles: Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25–26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1Cor. 1:2; 6:1–2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2Cor. 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13; Eph. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil. 1:1; 4:22; Col. 1:2, 4, 12, 26; 1 Th. 3:13; 2 Th. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:10; Philem. 1:5, 7.

3 Cf. Rom 4:1–6 to see how Paul uses Gen 15:6 as the foundation for his teaching that a person is justified on the basis of faith and not on the basis of one’s own deeds or works.

renders them equally righteous for they are all “in Yeshua” and thus viewed by the Father as having the righteousness of the Son. This is why for all who are truly born from above and brought to new life by the Spirit, the growing characteristic of their lives will be conformity to Yeshua, sanctified unto Him and apart from the unrighteousness of the world.

Thus, all who are “in Messiah” are likewise “of God’s household.” This pictures dwelling together with God Himself. The Greek term translated “household” (*οἰκεῖος, oikeios*) is found only here and two other times in Paul’s epistles: Gal 6:10 and 1Tim 5:8. The reference in 1Tim 5:8 is speaking of the obligation of the head of a household to provide necessary things for the family. The reference in Galatians, like the use of the term here in Ephesians, is using “household” as a reference to the *ekklesia* made up of believers in Yeshua.

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal 6:10)

Here, a priority is placed upon the community of believers in Yeshua. While believers must seek to do good to all people, where there is limited ability to do so, the priority must be to seek the good and welfare of believers first.

In the same way, the use of “household” in our Ephesians passage refers to the community of believers. While this is demonstrated within local communities of believers, the reality is that wherever true believers meet together, they represent the wider, universal body or *ekklesia* of Messiah which He promised to build and to protect (Matt 16:18).

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – Having pictured the body of Messiah as a “household” in order to express the bond by which believers are united in Yeshua, the metaphor moves easily to that of the house or building itself in which the family dwells. Even as the family of God owes its creation to His sovereign power and His infinite grace seen in the giving of His Son Yeshua, so the success of the *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build begins with the very foundation upon which it stands. This foundation consists of two primary elements: that of the apostles and prophets on the one hand, and Messiah Yeshua Himself, on the other.

We should first note that the phrase “having been built” translates a single verb, *ἐποικοδομηθέντες* (*epoikodomēthentes* < *ἐποικοδομέω, epoikodomēō*), which is an aorist past participle denoting a process which took

place in the past and is now finished, that is, the reader's response to the Gospel by which they repented and believed and were thereby born again unto eternal salvation. By this Paul gives the cause for that which he stated in the previous verses:

his Gentile readers are citizens together with the saints and members of God's household *because* they were built on the foundation of the apostles, prophets, and Christ Jesus.¹

...*the foundation of the apostles and prophets* – The fact that the order Paul gives us “apostles and prophets” in that order would indicate that he is referring to the Apostles commissioned by Yeshua Himself, including Paul, and the prophets are those who functioned in the early communities of The Way, endowed by the Ruach with the gift to speak forth the truth of God to the believing community, as well as to aid them in decision-making and direction for the followers of Yeshua. Even as the Apostles were given divine revelation and were guided by the Spirit as they wrote what became the Apostolic Scriptures, so the prophets were endowed with the gift of communicating the truth of the established Scriptures (the Tanach) as well as helping to guide the community of believers as they sensed the Spirit giving them revelation.

While the written Scriptures which the Apostles produced as they were borne along by the Spirit (2Pet 1:21) had divine authority, the words of the prophets were subject to the prophets (1Cor 14:32) and thus they did not prophecy with absolute divine authority but apparently could be corrected or their prophecy modified by other prophets. It appears that the gift of prophecy was given to the early Apostolic ekklesia as necessary to help provide divine guidance, awaiting the time when the Apostolic Scriptures were completed and could thereby function as the inspired guidebook for the ekklesia Yeshua promised to build. As Hoehner notes:

In light of an incomplete canon, the prophets may well have received revelation to complete what was needed so that every person could be presented perfect before God (Eph 4:12; Col 1:28). In conclusion, it seems that both the apostle and the prophet were involved in revelation.²

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 179.

2 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 400.

This parallels what Paul writes in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect (τέλειος, *teleios*) has come, the partial will be done away. (1Cor 13:9–10)

Indeed, the role of the prophets in the Apostolic era may well have been especially to make known God's intention that the Gentile believers be received as equally part of God's family as were the Jewish believers. Paul may be speaking of this in Eph 3:5–6 where he will write about a mystery previously unknown but now revealed by God "to His holy apostles and prophets."

Thus, while there are many different interpretations of what Paul means by the phrase "the foundation of the apostles and prophets," it seems most warranted to understand this phrase to mean "the divine revelation given to the apostles and prophets," that is, what eventually was gathered together and recognized to be the divinely inspired Apostolic Scriptures which, in full harmony with the extant Scriptures of the Tanach, formed the foundation upon which Yeshua would build His *ekklesia*, now to be comprised of people from every nation and family of the earth.

Messiah Yeshua Himself being the corner stone – Some have noted that in 1Cor 3:11 Paul identifies the foundation as Yeshua Himself, which seems at odds with what he writes in Ephesians, that the apostles and prophets form the foundation with Yeshua being the cornerstone.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Messiah Yeshua. (1Cor 3:11)

But this is not at odds with what Paul writes here, for the apostles and prophets, being led and energized by the Ruach HaKodesh, consistently pointed to Yeshua and His work of redemption through His death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly intercession. Some scholars have sought to show that the Greek word ἀκρογωνιαίος (*akkrogōniaios*), used in the Apostolic Scriptures only here and in 1Pet 2:6 (quoting Is 28:16), means "top stone" rather than cornerstone, but this has been challenged¹ and most scholars agree that the word indicates a stone set at the corner by which the extended foundation is aligned.

It may well be that Paul had Is 28:16 in mind when he refers to Yeshua as the "cornerstone."

1 See R. J. McKelvey, "Christ the Cornerstone," *NTS* 8 (July 1962), 352–59 and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 405, n. 1.

Therefore thus says Adonai יהוה, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.” (Is 28:16)

In modern times, the cornerstone of a building is often positioned into place at the time the building is dedicated. Not so in ancient times. The cornerstone was the first stone laid and those building the structure were very careful to assure that it was laid properly. For it was the cornerstone that set the angle for the adjoining walls. As one writer puts it:

The *acrogoniaios* here is the primary foundation-stone at the angle of structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout.¹

Thus, the cornerstone is that by which every other stone in the structure finds its proper placement and bearing. Thus, the cornerstone is the most important stone in the foundation because all other stones in the building are ultimately placed in alignment with it.

The application of Paul’s metaphor is clear. Messiah Yeshua Himself is the living cornerstone and the apostles and prophets who comprise the foundation do so because they are, by the Spirit’s work, perfectly aligned with Him. Likewise, since all successive generations of the *ekklesia* Yeshua is building are likewise built upon this foundation, the consistent measure of what the *ekklesia* should be is measured by the very person of our Savior, Yeshua.

Utilizing the body as the metaphor of the *ekklesia*, Paul gives us the same emphasis in the epistle to the Colossians.

He is also head of the body, the *ekklesia*; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col 1:18)

This means that in all we endeavor to accomplish as the *ekklesia* that Yeshua promised to build, He must be seen in all things and in all aspects of our community as having absolute priority and preeminence. Let us strive to be communities that shine for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Yeshua! The final verses of this chapter emphasize this very truth.

1 W. Watkiss Lloyd, “Notes: Eph ii.20–22,” *Classical Review* 3 (Nov 1889), 419, as noted in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 407, n. 1.

21–22 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Here Paul speaks both of the so-called “universal *ekklesia*” as well as of the local communities which make up the *ekklesia* in its totality. The *ekklesia* that Yeshua promised to build is generational and includes all believers throughout all time. Clearly the *ekklesia* of Yeshua has taken on greater dimensions throughout earth’s history, with the building having the foundation of the apostles and prophets being the final stage in which the covenant promise made to Abraham is being fulfilled. For from the Apostolic era to the present, the ingathering of the nations has been done in measures previously unknown. Thus, when Paul speaks of “the whole building,” he has in mind not only the *ekklesia* as it has existed from the creation of mankind, but also each community of true believers in every generation.

Note that Paul begins v. 21 with “in Whom,” meaning “in Messiah Yeshua.” This emphasizes, once again, that the whole structure has its unity and purpose in Messiah. Apart from Him, the structure of the *ekklesia* fails to be what He intends it to be.

Paul looks at the *ekklesia* here as being built stone upon stone, as stone masons cut or shape the stones to fit together to form the wall and thus the structure of the whole. This speaks to the fact that God is the One who places us together and thus has “fitted us” to be those who both are called as well as equipped to help one another become what He intends us to be. It is when we bear one another’s burdens that we fulfill the very Torah/teaching of Messiah.

Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

Not only is the foundation of the structure fully aligned to the person and work of Yeshua, thus giving the *ekklesia* stability and direction, but the very person of Messiah, known through the inspired word of God and the work of the Ruach HaKodesh in each believer, is the One causing the maturing and growth of the believing community. As each member of the community matures and grows in their faith, the *ekklesia* more and more becomes a greater witness to the watching world of the very presence of God among His people.

This is what Paul means by using the picture of a “holy temple in the Lord.” For in the Temple of Solomon, the glory of the Lord filled the

Temple (1Ki 8:8–11) so that all witnessed the visible presence of the Almighty. And once again, Paul adds “in the Lord,” which in this context is equivalent to “in Messiah.” The glory of God in the *ekklesia* is recognized when Yeshua is given first place in all things.

... *in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God* – While some would take “in whom” as being “in which,” referring to the “holy temple” just mentioned, it is more natural to take the referent, once again, to be Yeshua. It is in our union with Messiah Yeshua, by means of the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh, that we find our true unity together as the *ekklesia* of Yeshua.

We also see in Paul’s inspired words here, a true assurance of God’s promised work within the *ekklesia*, for he writes that we “are being built together.” The present tense of the verb “being built” (*συνοικοδομείσθε*, *sunoikodomeisthe* < *συνοικοδομέω*, *sunoikodomeō*) emphasizes that God is at work presently and continues to be the divine “Builder” of the *ekklesia*. Through every generation, the Almighty continues to build the *ekklesia*, even as Yeshua Himself promised in Matt 16:18. We can therefore take great comfort in the fact that, even though we have our own weakness and stumbling, God will continue to build our communities so long as we seek Him and His guidance, and commit ourselves to obey Him, giving Yeshua preeminence in all things.

... *in the Spirit*. – Some take this to describe the *ekklesia* as a “spiritual” entity, but Paul is not separating “spiritual” from “physical” here, for the *ekklesia* is made up of people and therefore of physical aspects as well as non-physical. Some take this final phrase to mean “by means of the Spirit,” which is clearly true, for it is by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God that we are more and more conformed to the image of Yeshua and thus enabled to serve Him as we desire. A third option is to take “in the Spirit” not to indicate the means by which we are built together but rather to teach that the dwelling of God in the holy temple of the *ekklesia* is “by the Spirit” or “in the Spirit.” As Hoehner notes:

Whereas in verse 21 the temple was in the sphere of Christ, this verse may be describing “the manner of God’s dwelling in this holy temple, viz., in the Spirit.” Or it may refer to the means or instrument of God’s dwelling, namely, “by/with the Spirit.”

Thus, in the indwelling Spirit of God, we, as the *ekklesia* Yeshua promised to build, form a “holy temple” in which the very presence of God dwells. What a grand privilege we have as comprising the family of God!