

ONE NEW TEMPLE IN CHRIST (EPHESIANS 2:11-22; ACTS
21:27-29; MARK 11:17; JOHN 4:20-24)

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One striking image in the New Testament is that of a new temple in Christ. Ephesians 2 connects this new temple with the bringing together of Jew and Gentile in shared worship to God. Although the theology of this multicultural temple is most obvious in this passage, it develops not only Paul's earlier theology of ethnic reconciliation in Christ (which we may observe, for example, in Romans), but Jesus' and Paul's own challenges to the traditional temple's ethnic barriers (as in Mk 11:17; Jn 4:20-24; and Acts 21:27-29).

Traditionally Christians have defined "missions" in terms of crosscultural evangelism and discipleship. The biblical goal of such crosscultural ministry, however, was never meant to yield a long-range distinction between "sending" and "receiving" churches. Partnership between churches, with reciprocal gifts and responsibilities, is a much closer idea (cf. Rom 15:27; 2 Cor 8—9), though the defined roles and differentiation often attached to notions of partnership must be adaptable, pragmatic tools, not inflexible boundaries. The eschatological reality and present ideal in this passage point to a more ultimate principle, proclaiming an equal citizenship in God's kingdom, a unity in worship that welcomes all contributions without ignoring the diversity of the contributing cultures.

1. Eph 2:11-22 and Paul's Experience with the Divided Temple (Acts
21:27-29)¹

¹I have treated this subject elsewhere in Craig Keener, "Some New Testament Invitations to Ethnic Reconciliation," *Evangelical Quarterly* 75 (3, July 2003): 195-213, here 210-13; idem, "The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation," 117-30, 181-90 in *The Gospel in Black & White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation* (ed. Dennis L. Ockholm; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 118-22.

Paul's image of a temple uniting Jew and Gentile challenged the ethnically segregated reality of the temple standing in his own day. The ancient Israelite temple did not segregate Gentiles from Jews or women from men, but just priests from laity (1 Kgs 8:41-43; 2 Chron 6:32-33). By the time of Jesus and Paul, however, Herod's temple segregated all these groups to fulfill a stricter understanding of purity regulations.² The outer court was now divided into the court of Israel (for Jewish men); on a lower level outside it, the court of women, for Jewish women; and on a lower level outside that, the outer court beyond which Gentiles could not pass. Strategically posted signs, attested both in Josephus and archaeology, warned Gentiles that those who passed this point would be responsible for their own immediate execution.³ Judeans normally were not allowed to execute death sentences directly, but violation of their temple constituted the one exception!⁴

Both Paul and his audience would have been well-aware of this symbol of Jewish-Gentile division at the very heart of divine worship.⁵ In Acts 21:27, some Jewish people from the Roman province of Asia saw Paul exiting the temple. Much of the Jewish community in Ephesus, that province's most prominent city, felt that they had reason for animosity against Paul. In 19:9, he split their synagogue; in 19:33-34, they were blamed for a riot that was reacting against his monotheistic preaching. They had also seen him in Jerusalem with

²See e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 3.318-19; 15.417; *War* 5.194; 6.124-26, 426-27; *m. Kel.* 1:8. Such purity regulations may be partly in mind in Eph 2:15 as it relates to shattering the dividing wall in Eph 2:14.

³Josephus *Ant.* 15.417; *War* 5.194; 6.125-26; cf. Philo *Embassy* 212; the inscription in Efrat Carmon, ed., *Inscriptions Reveal: Documents from the Time of the Bible, the Mishna and the Talmud* (trans. R. Grafman; Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1973), pp. 76, 167-68, §169; G. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 80-81; comment in Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 119-20. Most ancients could not read, but presumably word would spread; many ancient temples had various sorts of purity regulations, some requiring death for violation (e.g., Strabo 14.6.3; Hesiod *Astron.* frg. 3).

⁴Cf. Josephus *War* 6.126; *m. Sanh.* 9:6; discussion in Peretz Segal, "The 'Divine Death Penalty' in the Hatra Inscriptions and the Mishnah," *JJS* 40 (1, 1989): 46-52.

⁵I cover these observations from Acts in much more detail in my forthcoming Acts commentary (Hendrickson).

Trophimus, a Gentile they recognized from Ephesus (21:29). Knowing Paul's commitment to Gentiles as well as Jews (19:10), they drew a faulty conclusion. They accused Paul of having violated the temple's sanctity by bringing a Gentile inside (21:28)! A riot quickly ensued,⁶ and God ironically used the Roman garrison on the temple mount to protect Paul, even though the garrison commander wrongly initially presumed Paul the instigator of the unrest.

Paul's ensuing speech to the crowd⁷ was in Aramaic and offered abundant common ground with his audience (e.g., 22:12). They patiently listened to his testimony about Jesus, perhaps because of the culturally sensitive witness of the Jerusalem church (cf. 21:20). Paul could have built on this hearing as Peter did in 2:37-41, summoning people to repentance. Paul, however, would not leave out his call to the Gentiles (22:21-22), and the riot resumed. Why did Paul insist on talking about Gentiles, even when it risked alienating a hostile crowd?⁸ Judean nationalism had been on the rise since Judea had briefly had its own king (41-44 CE) and suffered abuses under subsequent Roman governors; revolt against Rome (66-73 CE) was probably less than a decade away. The Jerusalem church successfully identified with their culture in proclaiming Christ to them (21:20), but they did not prophetically warn their culture that their nationalism was leading them toward cultural destruction. We should indeed identify with our peoples (cf. 21:26; 1 Cor 9:20-21), but not to the extent of breaking fellowship with believers of other cultures. If Christ is truly our Lord, then we must be loyal to Christ's body, despite its diversity of languages and customs, more than to any ethnicity. For Paul, as we shall see, the true gospel involved ethnic reconciliation, and someone truly embracing Christ could not hate other peoples. Paul's provocative message was rejected, but God vindicated Paul's message, and Jesus' warning (Lk 19:41-44; 21:20-24), when Jerusalem fell in 70.⁹

⁶Dangerous riots sometimes occurred in the temple (Josephus *War* 2.224-27), requiring extra precautions during the festivals (*War* 5.244); this is probably a festival or just after one (see Acts 20:16).

⁷From the staircase (Acts 21:40) noted in Josephus *War* 5.243-44.

⁸Paul did exercise the rhetorical sensitivity to otherwise establish rapport first (as recommended in rhetoric; see e.g., *Rhet. Alex.* 29, 1436b.17-19, 38-40; 1437a.1-1438a.2; 1442a.22-1442b.27).

⁹I treat this question more fully in my forthcoming Acts commentary, *passim*. Since Jesus prophesied this event before 70, this issue differs from the question of Acts' dating; some evangelicals date Acts after 70 (e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [3rd

Paul's failure to accommodate hatred of Gentiles ironically led to several years in Roman custody. He was held for up to two years in Caesarea, Rome's capital for Judea (Acts 24:27), then sent to Rome. On what I currently think the likeliest background for Ephesians, Paul writes to the churches of the Roman province of Asia, starting in Ephesus, from Roman custody (Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).¹⁰ (Ephesians circulated in Roman Asia beyond Ephesus, but that was probably the center of his audience.)¹¹ Because both Trophimus and Paul's accusers

rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 1990], 18, in contrast to his earlier view; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 165-72), others before (e.g., E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Historical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], 16; tentatively, Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 25-27).

¹⁰Many scholars have argued against Pauline authorship; see e.g., Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), lix-lxxiii; D. E. Nineham, "The Case Against the Pauline Authorship," 21-35 in *Studies in Ephesians*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1956); C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians*, NCBC (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1976), 4-11; John C. Kirby, *Ephesians: Baptism and Pentecost. An Enquiry into the Structure and Purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Montreal: McGill University, 1968), 3-56. But in favor of Pauline authorship, see e.g., Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 2-61, 114-30 (thoroughly); J. N. Sanders, "The Case for the Pauline Authorship," 9-20 in *Studies in Ephesians*, ed. Cross; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; London: SCM Press, 1976), 63; Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; AB 34-34A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1974), 1:3-60; cf. A. Van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians* (NovTSup 39; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 37-44; Henry J. Cadbury, "The Dilemma of Ephesians," *NTS* 5 (2, Jan. 1959): 91-102. I believe that the style is sufficiently Pauline, if one allows for some "Asianist" rhetoric and his increased skill in using Stoic language (as in Philippians; cf. Acts 19:9), and that Hoehner's argument (favoring Paul's authorship) is compelling.

¹¹For this approach to the circular letter, see e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 78-79, 144-48; J. Armitage Robinson, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (2nd ed.; London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1904), 11; Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1955), 199; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 389; Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic. The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (SNTSMS 63; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 5-6. Manuscripts could also generalize originally more specific addressees; see Harry Y. Gamble, "Canonical Formation of the New Testament," 183-94 in *Dictionary*

were from the area of Ephesus, believers in Ephesus would know why Paul was writing to them from Roman custody.

Thus for Paul, and for his audience, there could be no greater symbol of the division between Jew and Gentile than this dividing wall in the temple. Yet Paul declares that this barrier, established by biblical laws dividing Jews from Gentiles, has been shattered by Jesus Christ (Eph 2:14-15)! “For he himself is our peace, who forged both Israelite and Gentile into one and abolished the dividing barrier, annulling the enmity ...” Paul offered this startling claim in a setting where many would have resented it. He was declaring that there was neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28) in a world of mutual hostility between these groups; just a few years later Jews and Syrians began massacring each other in the streets of Caesarea,¹² and less than a decade afterward Romans devastated Jerusalem, burning its temple and enslaving its survivors.

Yet with a vision to the future, Paul goes on to speak here of a new temple, in which Jews and Gentiles together become a holy temple, God’s household, the dwelling of the Spirit (2:19-22). Paul’s conceptualization of this new temple related concretely to his own situation, but it also reflected antecedent teaching by Jesus himself, who both predicted the temple’s destruction¹³ and posed theological challenges to the segregation there.

2. Jesus and the Divided Temple (Mk 11:17; Jn 4:20-24)

Paul had significant precedent for the connection between the temple and perceptions of Jewish-Gentile separation.¹⁴ As we have noted, Herod’s temple separated Gentiles, who risked carrying impurity associated with idolatry, from the courts of Jewish women and men. When Jesus overturned merchants’ tables in the temple, he challenged the one part of the temple where Gentiles were welcome. While we

of New Testament Background (ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 186; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 1-4.

¹²Josephus *War* 2.266-70, 457-58.

¹³Historically, see Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 560-63, and the many sources cited there; also my forthcoming work on the historical Jesus of the Gospels.

¹⁴Qumran also spoke of a spiritual temple (e.g., 1QS 8.5-9; Bertril Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965], 16-46), but Gentiles were excluded.

might doubt a connection between these two features (we could find other activities limited to the outer court as well), Mk 11:17 indicates a concern for Gentiles' worship in God's house.¹⁵

Jesus cited two texts as he overturned the tables: Is 56:7 and Jer 7:11. The context of Is 56 welcomes Gentiles to worship God, removing their stigma as second-class citizens among the true God's worshipers. The particular verse (56:7) declares, "I will bring foreigners to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house for prayer ... because my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations." From the beginning, God had intended his house to welcome all peoples! Gentiles' restriction to the outer court, however, cannot have encouraged them the way that Isaiah intended.

Jesus blends his reference to Is 56:7 with another allusion, when he indicates that the Sadducean elite who currently controlled the temple had turned it into a "robber's den." The phrase derives from Jer 7:11, in a context emphasizing judgment against the temple. Israel thought that God would not destroy his own temple (7:4); in their estimation, shared with their contemporaries in many surrounding cultures, judgment was not what a god was for. But God challenged their blindness: Will you mistreat your neighbor and worship other gods, then come into this house that is called by my name and say, "We are protected!" (7:5-10). God goes on to warn that they are treating his house like the way robbers treat their lairs—a safe place to store their loot and hide out. But the temple would *not* protect them; they could not hide from God's anger there, for he would destroy that temple and banish them from the land (7:12-15).

Jesus does not simply echo texts casually to sound "biblical"; he selects these texts deliberately. Jesus pronounced judgment against the temple (Mk 13:1-2), just as Jeremiah did. Overturning tables in the temple offered an even more overt symbol of judgment than Jeremiah smashing a pot (Jer 19:10-12) had.¹⁶ His other teachings¹⁷ suggest that

¹⁵Matthew and Luke, laying emphasis instead on the judgment element, omit "Gentiles" here.

¹⁶Cf. e.g., E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 70, 368. Skeptics about Jesus' prediction exercise a double standard against canonical texts; some other Jewish people expected judgment on the temple before the event occurred (*T. Mos.* 6:8-9; *1 En.* 90:28-29; 11QTemple 29:8-10; *Josephus War* 6.301, 304, 306, 309), and others also prophesied Roman conquest before it happened (e.g., 1QpHab 9.6-7). Many less skeptical scholars also point to multiple attestation in favor of Jesus' warning.

he, like Isaiah, also wanted Gentiles to be welcome in God's eschatological temple.¹⁸ False witnesses seem to have twisted his words about a new temple (Mk 14:58; 15:29; cf. Acts 6:14), but John declares that the new temple that Jesus really proclaimed was his body (Jn 2:19-21).

The Gospels also offer us other indications that Jesus considered a new, spiritual temple, or at least offered the raw material (cf. e.g., Lk 19:40, 44; 20:17-18)¹⁹ that coalesced into an early Christian consensus about this image (cf. e.g., 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 1 Pet 2:4-8; Rev 3:12; 13:6). Clearest among these are Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman in Jn 4.²⁰ In this passage, Jesus seeks a true worshiper of God (Jn 4:23), hence "must" pass through Samaria (4:4) even though that route was merely the shortest way, not a strict geographic necessity.²¹

Jesus crosses multiple barriers to talk with this woman. First, Jesus crosses a gender barrier. Strict Jewish pietists did not wish to be seen talking alone with a woman; in their estimation, not only might this arouse temptation, but it might hurt one's reputation for piety.²² Thus the text notes that Jesus' disciples were surprised to find him

¹⁷See e.g., Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark International, 2006).

¹⁸On the eschatological temple in Jewish expectation, see Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 77-90.

¹⁹Cf. my forthcoming article, "Human Stones (Lk 3:8//Matt 3:9; Lk 19:40) in a Greek Setting."

²⁰I treat this in greater detail, and with further documentation, in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 611-19.

²¹The verb *dei* refers to divine necessity elsewhere in John (3:7, 14, 30; 4:20, 24; 9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9), and probably bears this sense here (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 255; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* [2 vols.; AB 29-29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966-1970], 1:169; J. Ramsey Michaels, *John* [GNC; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984], 59). Samaria was the preferred route (Josephus *War* 2.232; *Ant.* 10.118), but "necessary" only if one required haste (*Life* 269), which Jesus apparently did not (Jn 4:40).

²²E.g., Sir 9:9; 42:12; *m. Ab.* 1:5; *Ket.* 7:6; *t. Shab.* 1:14; *b. Ber.* 43b, bar. More widely, see e.g., Euripides *Electra* 343-44; Livy 34.2.9, 18 (though most Romans were more progressive). In the Middle East today, Carol Delaney, Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame." 35-48 in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; AAAM 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 41, 43.

speaking with a woman, though it also implies that they knew Jesus well enough not to question him (4:27).

Second, as with tax collectors and sinners in the other Gospels, Jesus crosses a moral barrier that his strictest contemporaries normally would not have crossed. In this culture, most women came to the well together; that this woman came separately, and at the hottest time of day (about the sixth hour, 4:6),²³ made it obvious that she was not welcome in the company of the other women.²⁴ Shockingly, Jesus asks her for a drink (4:7), something normal religious Jewish men would not do. Jewish law treated Jewish women as unclean one week of every month, but strict Jewish pietists viewed Samaritan women as unclean every week of every month since they were babies (immoral or not)!²⁵

Pietists would have also resented the setting's ambiguity, because wells were notorious. It was at wells that Isaac's steward met Rebekah (Gen 24:11, 15-19), Jacob met Rachel (Gen 29:10), and Moses met Zipporah (Ex 2:15-17). Other sources show us that some people considered wells to be appropriate places to find mates.²⁶ When Jesus asks the woman to bring her husband (Jn 4:16), she assumes that he is questioning whether she is married, and she responds that she is not (4:17)—i.e., that she is available. At this point Jesus clarifies the real point: she is not married to the man she is living with (4:18). Thus, she responds that he is a prophet (4:19). He would not have to be a prophet to discern that she had a bad reputation—coming to the well alone might have suggested that. But that she was married five times and was not married to her current boyfriend was not the sort of knowledge a stranger could simply infer.

Her indication that Jesus was a prophet, however, brings us to the third barrier, which pervades the entire encounter, namely the cultural and ethnic barrier. As we learn in 4:9, Jews did not deal with Samaritans. Now she claims that Jesus is a prophet; but as best as we can reconstruct on the basis of later Samaritan traditions, Samaritans

²³E.g., Sophocles *Antig.* 416; Apollonius Rhodius 2.739; 4.1312-13; Ovid *Metam.* 1.591-92; *Jos. Asen.* 3:2/3:3. People thus normally broke from work and found shade at this time (e.g., Columella *Trees* 12.1; Longus 2.4; Ovid *Metam.* 3.143-54). It aroused thirst (Livy 44.36.1-2; Longus 3.31), also relevant here (Jn 4:7).

²⁴Cf. e.g., Brown, *John*, 1:169.

²⁵*M. Nid.* 4:1; *Toh.* 5:8; *t. Nid.* 5:1; see comments in David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.; London: University of London, 1956), 373.

²⁶Arrian *Alex.* 2.3.4; perhaps *Lam. Rab.* 1:1, §19.

did not believe in regular prophets, apart from an end-time prophet like Moses.²⁷ By calling this Jew a prophet, she implicitly acknowledges that the Jews rather than the Samaritans are right about God (as Jesus reaffirms in 4:22).

When she goes on to note, “Our ancestors worshiped at this mountain” (Mount Gerizim,²⁸ in full view of the well), “but you Jews worship in Jerusalem,” we might suppose that she is changing the subject to evade the issue of her immorality. But such a cultural reading is far from how Samaritans would have understood it. If Jesus is a prophet, then her entire religious worldview must be reconstructed. The most fundamental point of contention between Jews and Samaritans was their respective holy sites. This is evident already in the verb tenses she employs: “our ancestors *worshiped*” (aorist), but “you Jews *worship*” (present). Jews had destroyed Samaritans’ temple on Mount Gerizim about a century and a half earlier.²⁹ Samaritans would never have been able to destroy Jerusalem’s temple mount, but they had once desecrated it³⁰ and they continued to ridicule it.³¹ Samaritans were now barred from Jerusalem’s temple.³² If the Jewish people are right and the Samaritans are wrong, how can this woman worship God?

²⁷F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 37-38; idem, *The Time is Fulfilled* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 39. Josephus’ Samaritan prophet on Mount Gerizim (*Ant.* 18.85-86) possibly fits this expectation.

²⁸For Samaritan emphasis on Mount Gerizim, see Josephus *Ant.* 18.85-87; *War* 3.307-15; *t. A.Z.* 3:13; John Bowman, *Samaritan Documents Relating to Their History, Religion & Life* (POTTS 2; Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1977), 14.

²⁹Josephus *War* 1.63-66; *Ant.* 13.255-56. Scholars have cited possible archaeological evidence for its destruction; see Robert J. Bull, “Field Report XII,” *BASOR* 180 (Dec. 1965): 37-41, here 41; Finegan, *Archeology*, 35; Howard Clark Kee, “Tell-Er-Ras and the Samaritan Temple,” *NTS* 13 (4, July 1967): 401-2; G. G. Garner, “The Temples of Mt. Gerizim. Tell er Ras—Probable Site of the Samaritan Temple,” *Buried History* 11 (1, 1975): 33-42; Benedikt Schwank, “Grabungen auf ‘diesem Berg’ (Joh 4,20-21). Der archäologische Beitrag,” *BK* 47 (4, 1992): 220-21. Others, however, find this more questionable; see Robert T. Anderson, “The Elusive Samaritan Temple,” *BA* 54 (2, 1991): 104-7; but cf. John McRay, “Archaeology and the NT,” 93-100 in *Dictionary of NT Background*, 96.

³⁰Josephus *Ant.* 18.29-30.

³¹See e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 32:10; 81:3; cf. Lk 9:51-53.

³²Josephus *Ant.* 18.30. This exclusion began in the time of Coponius (*Ant.* 18.29), who was governor from 6-9 CE.

Jesus responds that the true site of worship is neither in Jerusalem nor on Mount Gerizim. Rather, the true “place” of worship is in Spirit and in truth (possibly a hendiadys for, “in the Spirit of truth”).³³ That is, no physical location defines where God is to be worshiped; what matters is Spirit-empowered worship (4:24).³⁴ God is so great that no worship of him is adequate unless God’s own Spirit births it. The true temple is dwelling in God, and God dwelling in us (cf. Jn 14:23). Even in Revelation, where we might expect an eschatological temple like the one described in Ezek 40—48, we find something better, not worse, than Ezekiel’s vision.³⁵ The entire New Jerusalem is shaped like the holy of holies; the city has no need of a temple, for God dwells with all his people in all the city. God himself, and the lamb, are its temple (Rev 21:22).

Because the true temple is one in the Spirit, Jesus crossed three barriers to make this woman a true worshiper of God. Because true worship is not limited to any geographic location or ethnicity or culture, we must cross every barrier to introduce people to new life, hence true worship of God, in the Spirit.

3. Paul’s Theology of Multicultural Unity in Christ (Romans)³⁶

Paul’s vision of a new, spiritual temple in Ephesians is no afterthought to his theology; in earlier letters he already addresses all believers as a spiritual temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16) and those who offer spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). Even more critically, the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles had always been a dominant element in his preaching of the gospel. In the United States, where in some locations blacks and whites once had to eat at different lunch counters, I like to remark that Paul once challenged Peter at a segregated lunch counter (Gal 2:11-14).

Paul is most explicit about this perspective in Romans, probably because the church in Rome had special problems surrounding it.

³³With Brown, *John*, 1:180.

³⁴Cf. Phil 3:3; discussion in Keener, *John*, 615-19.

³⁵See Craig Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 497, especially 504.

³⁶I address this theme in Romans in more detail in Keener, “Gospel and Reconciliation,” 122-25; idem, “Invitations,” 208-10; also my forthcoming Romans commentary (Wipf & Stock).

Following Claudius' edict (probably c. A.D. 49),³⁷ many Jewish Christians left Rome (Acts 18:1-3), but a few years later, when Claudius died, some returned (Rom 16:3). Many or most scholars believe that the consequent influx of Jewish believers into what had for several years been a largely Gentile movement in Rome set the stage for the clash of cultures there.³⁸ I agree that this scenario is very likely, but in any case we may be even more certain about Paul's solution, since it remains explicit in the letter itself: Paul goes out of his way in Romans to emphasize that salvation is for both Jew and Gentile (e.g., Rom 1:16; 10:11-13). The body of his letter climaxes with scriptural proofs for Jews and Gentiles worshipping God together (15:6-12).³⁹

³⁷Suetonius *Claud.* 25.4. For the date, see e.g., Arthur Darby Nock, "Religious Developments from the Close of the Republic to the Death of Nero," 465-511 in *The Augustan Empire: 44 B.C.-A.D. 70*, vol. 10 in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (12 vols., ed. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock and M. P. Charlesworth; Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 500; Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," 117-27 in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 125-26; George Howard, "The Beginnings of Christianity in Rome: A Note on Suetonius, Life of Claudius XXV.4," *ResQ* 24 (3, 1981): 175-77; Stanley E. Porter, "Chronology, New Testament," 201-8 in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 206; Robert O. Hoerber, "The Decree of Claudius in Acts 18:2," *CTM* 31 (11, 1960): 690-94; Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEKNT 17; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 458; Lo Lung-Kwong, *Paul's Purpose in Writing Romans: The Upbuilding of A Jewish and Gentile Christian Community in Rome* (Jian Dao DS 6, Bible and Literature 4; Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1998), 78-82; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (ed. Marshall D. Johnson; trans. Michael Steinhauser; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 11-16.

³⁸E.g., A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Jews* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 53-61; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38A, B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 1:liii; Lung-Kwong, *Purpose*, 78-82; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 5; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 12-14, 797-98; Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 35-41; A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 7.

³⁹For Paul seeking to reconcile Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome, see e.g., W. S. Campbell, "Why Did Paul Write Romans?" *Expository Times* 85 (9, 1974) 264-69; Bruce Chilton, *Judaic Approaches to the Gospels* (USFISFCJ,

Paul constructs the entire letter to advance this theme. Jewish hearers⁴⁰ would agree with Paul's verdict that the Gentiles are lost (1:18-32); but Paul uses this verdict to establish in the next two chapters that Jews are also lost (2:1—3:23). Thus, Paul argues, all must come to God the same way, through Jesus Christ (3:24-31). Some Jewish people would have demurred; they believed that they were saved because they were chosen in Abraham!⁴¹ Paul thus responds that, far from being able to depend on ancestral merit, they must follow Abraham's model, hence be justified through faith (4:1—5:11). Moreover, if they wished to appeal to their ancestry in Abraham, Paul reminds them of everyone's common ancestry in Adam, who introduced sin (5:12-21).⁴²

Jewish people might object that the law gave them a righteousness that unconverted Gentiles could not possess (and, close to Paul's concern here, that converted Gentiles could acquire only with difficulty). Many sages felt that most Jews usually kept all 613 commandments that Jewish tradition found in the Torah, but most Gentiles could not even maintain the seven commandments that Jewish tradition attributed to Noah. But Paul insists that the law facilitated his death, though it was meant to bring life, because it could not transform him (7:7-25).⁴³ The law could *inform* him about righteousness, but it could *transform* him only if written in his heart by the Spirit (8:2; cf. Ezek 36:26-27; 2 Cor 3:3-6).

Now in Rom 9—11 Paul comes to the heart of his argument about the relation between Jew and Gentile. Jewish people believed that they were chosen in Abraham, but Paul insists that with respect to salvation,

vol. 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 222-24; Schreiner, *Romans*, 19-21; Lung-Kwong, *Purpose*, 413-14.

⁴⁰Technically, most of Romans' audience is ethnically Gentile (cf. 1:5, 13; 11:13), though they will identify with the Jewish roots of their faith.

⁴¹Neh 9:7; Mic 7:20; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 87-101; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness & Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (SBEC 5; New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984), 207.

⁴²Jewish people agreed that Adam introduced sin and death (*4 Ezra* 3:7; 4:30; 2 *Bar.* 17:2-3; 23:4; 48:42-45; 56:5-6; *L.A.E.* 44:3-4; *Sipre Deut.* 323.5.1; 339.1.2), but many believed that his descendants also replicated the sin (*4 Ezra* 3:21; 2 *Bar.* 18:1-2; 54:15, 19; cf. *4 Ezra* 4 *Ezra* 7:118-26).

⁴³I agree with most scholars that the point of Rom 7 is life under the law more generally, not Paul's personal autobiography, but believe that Paul's own background enables and informs his description. The point would not differ for our purposes in any case.

God is not bound to choose based on ethnicity. Indeed, he warns that “not all Israel’s descendants are Israel” (9:6), nor are all Abraham’s descendants counted as his children (9:7). Abraham had two sons while Sarah remained alive: Isaac and Ishmael. Yet Paul points out in 9:7-8 that only one received the promise (though both were blessed). Isaac had two sons, but only one received the promise (9:10-13). In view of this pattern, how could Jewish people assume that they automatically belonged to the saving covenant based on their ethnicity?

But lest we think that Paul lectures only the minority of Jewish believers in Jesus involved with the Roman church, he decisively challenges the now-complacent and dominant Gentile believers as well. Not only is there still a remnant of Jewish believers (11:1-5) and a long-range hope for the Jewish people submitting to Jesus (11:12, 15, 26-27),⁴⁴ but Gentile believers are merely grafted as *proselytes* into Israel’s heritage (11:17-21).⁴⁵ As God used Israel’s disobedience to afford opportunity for Gentiles’ repentance before the end of the age, he also uses Gentiles’ obedience through Christ to provoke Israel’s jealousy that eschatological expectations about Gentiles are being fulfilled through Christ (11:13-14).⁴⁶

Having established the theological groundwork, Paul turns to the practical demands that follow from these observations. Believers need to serve one another (12:9-15), for the real heart of the law is loving one another (13:8-10). On a practical level, this teaching especially meant that Gentile believers must not look down on Jewish people’s food customs or holy days (Rom 14:1—15:6), as ancient sources show

⁴⁴The sense of “Israel” in the immediate context of 11:26 seems ethnic rather than spiritual; cf. Johannes Munck, *Christ & Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9-11* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 136; George E. Ladd, “Israel and the Church,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 36 (1964): 206-13.

⁴⁵For Gentile converts as proselytes here, see Terence L. Donaldson, ““Riches for the Gentiles” (Rom 11:12): Israel’s Rejection and Paul’s Gentile Mission,” *JBL* 112 (1, Spring 1993): 81-98; idem, “Israelite, Convert, Apostle to the Gentiles: The Origin of Paul’s Gentile Mission,” 62-84 in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 81-82; idem, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 230-47; also Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005): 5.

⁴⁶See discussion in Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 249-50.

us Roman Gentiles frequently did.⁴⁷ Paul urges unity in Christ that welcomes rather than suppresses the diversity of our cultures. Paul concludes that argument by citing Scriptures for Jews and Gentiles united in common worship of Israel's true God (15:6-12). He then offers examples of Jewish-Gentile cooperation: Jesus, though Jewish, became a minister to the Gentiles (15:8-9); the Jewish missionary Paul evangelizes Gentiles (15:18-24) and brings an offering from the mixed Diaspora churches to the needy believers in Jerusalem (15:25-27). He also invites the largely Gentile Roman believers to partner with him in prayer (15:30) and support (15:24, 28). His final closing exhortation is to beware of those who cause division (16:17).⁴⁸ From start to finish, a central concern of Paul in writing Romans appears to be the uniting of believers of different backgrounds.

When I was going through the deepest crisis of my life since my conversion, an African-American family basically adopted me into their family and circle of churches and nurtured me back to wholeness. African-Americans had survived slavery and countless other trials, and had learned how to depend on God on times of difficulty in ways that I had not discovered in the white church circles of which I had usually been a part. Since 1991, I have been a minister in a largely African-American church movement.⁴⁹ My wife, who is from Congo in Central Africa, survived eighteen months as a refugee during an ethnic war in her country. During this time, she and her family showed love to people from the other side of the war; they even provided for a foreign mercenary working for the other side who had been captured and abused.⁵⁰ We have observed that Christ's love must transcend ethnic boundaries, no matter what the cost.

⁴⁷See e.g., Juvenal *Sat.* 14.96-106.

⁴⁸Perhaps even over food (16:18). Nevertheless, "belly" was used widely in moralistic literature for any uncontrolled passions; see e.g., 3 Macc 7:11; Philo *Spec. Laws* 1.148, 192, 281; 4.91; further sources in Keener, *Matthew*, 342; for "slave of the belly," as here, see e.g., Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 25.6; Achilles Tatius 2.23.1; Philostratus *V.A.* 1.7.

⁴⁹On the story, see e.g., Lynette Blair Mitchell, "Charismatic Scholar Targets Racism," *Charisma* (June 1996): 28, 30; Gayle White, "Colorblind Calling," *The Atlanta Journal & Constitution* (Nov. 3, 1991): M1, 4; Flo Johnston, "Ordination will cross racial lines," *Religious News Service* (e.g., in *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1991, section 2.9).

⁵⁰See e.g., Craig Keener and Médine Moussounga Keener, "Reconciliation for Africa: Resources for Ethnic Reconciliation" (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2006), 12.

4. Eschatological Unity and God's Temple (Rev 5:9; 7:9)

The image of united, multicultural worship to God continues into the latest parts of the New Testament, the closing witness of the first apostolic church. Thus the “furniture” it depicts in heaven evokes that of the biblical temple: the ark (Rev 11:19); an altar of sacrifice (6:9); an altar of incense (8:3-5); a sea (4:6; 15:2; cf. 1 Kgs 7:23-25); lamps (Rev 4:5); and even harps (14:2; 15:2). Indeed, it is called both a tabernacle (Rev 13:6; 15:5) and a temple (14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17). What does one do in a temple? In particular, one worships. Whereas the scenes of earth in Revelation involve judgment (e.g., chs. 6; 8—9; 16) or the worship of the beast (13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20; cf. 9:20), the scenes of heaven involve worshipping God and the lamb (4:8-10; 5:9-14; 7:11; 11:1, 16; 14:7; 19:4).⁵¹

Likewise, in the eternal future, the very shape of the New Jerusalem evokes, as we noted earlier, the Holy of Holies (21:16; cf. 1 Kgs 6:20). One would normally not expect a city to be over two thousand kilometers high, but the equal length, breadth and height of the city reinforces the allusion to the holy of holies. When God promises that he will dwell among his people there (21:3), he portrays the city not only as a temple, but as the holy of holies itself! Thus the eternal future, involving “heaven on earth,” so to speak, continues this worship that Revelation reveals already in heaven (22:3). Although the New Jerusalem is for all believers, it is founded on the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the lamb (21:12, 14).

One of Revelation's scenes of worship, in 7:9-17, shows that the multicultural multitude has been grafted into Israel's heritage. Although they are from all peoples (7:9),⁵² Jesus' followers are depicted in language evoking prophetic promises to Israel, because devotion to Israel's true king rather than ethnicity determines one's status in the covenant (cf. 2:9; 3:9). Thus they neither hunger nor thirst nor suffer from the sun, but the lamb leads them to springs of water (7:16). Revelation's language here evokes Is 49:10, where God would protect his people from hunger, thirst, and the sun, and would lead them to springs of water. In Rev 7:17, the lamb wipes away the tears of his

⁵¹See also Keener, *Revelation*, 91-92.

⁵²This echoes Nebuchadnezzar's empire (e.g., Dan 3:7, 31; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14; esp. 3:4), but God's kingdom would supplant all worldly empires (2:44-45), and will include representatives from all peoples (7:13-14; see Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993], 326-29).

followers; in Is 25:8, at the resurrection God would wipe away his people's tears. By the way that this passage reframes OT prophecies, it emphasizes that Jesus is God and that his followers are together God's people.

This scene immediately follows another vision in which God has 144,000 servants from Israel's twelve tribes. Since Scripture predicts the turning of the Jewish people to Christ in the end-time (Rom 11:26-27), we cannot rule out the possibility that this eschatological event is the point of this image. Sometimes in Scripture, however, a second vision or dream simply rearticulates the point of the first one (e.g., Gen 37:7, 9; 40:1-7), and that may be the case here.⁵³ We have already seen that 7:9-17 portray believers from all nations as part of God's people. What is the likelihood that this is the case for the 144,000? We do know that Revelation portrays all believers as spiritually Jewish, grafted into Israel's heritage (e.g., 1:20;⁵⁴ 2:9; 3:9). Moreover, the 144,000 are the number of God's "servants" (7:3-4)—which elsewhere in Revelation involves believers, the saved (1:1; 10:7; 11:18; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6). The seal on them connects them with all believers (3:12; 22:4; cf. 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Ezek 9:4; *Ps. Sol.* 15:6-9). Further, John's vision omits from the list of tribes the tribe of Dan, which is a curious omission if he intends the designation literally, since in Ezekiel Dan receives the first eschatological allotment (Ezek 48:1).

⁵³With most commentators, e.g., G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Divine* [HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1966], 94-95; Mathias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation* (trans. Gordon C. Winsor; Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1966), 89, 110; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 168-70; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* [NCBC; Greenwood, SC: Attic Press; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974], 140; Bauckham, *Climax*, 399; Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation* (Expositor's Bible Commentary; Zondervan, 1996), 85; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* [IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 113; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 412-23. I address this in Keener, *Revelation*, 230-33.

⁵⁴Lampstands were the most pervasive symbol for Judaism in the Roman empire; see e.g., *CIJ* 1:8, §4; 1:16, §14; 2:12, §743; 2:32, §771 and passim through 2:53, §801 (*CIJ* altogether contains about 200 examples); Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 49, 196-97; Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; New York: Pantheon Books for Bollingen Foundation, 1953-1965), 12:79-83.

Most importantly, Revelation reuses these numbers later. Although translations sometimes obscure the figures, the New Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia cubed (about 1500 miles or 2400 kilometers cubed), with a wall of some 144 cubits (over 200 feet or nearly 80 meters; 21:16-17). A wall of 200 feet or 80 meters is utterly disproportionate to a city that is 1500 miles (2400 kilometers) long, wide, and tall.⁵⁵ But Revelation elsewhere informs us that the measurements involve the people, not just the place (Rev 11:1). The New Jerusalem is the city of God for the people of God, a city whose very dimensions evoke the 144,000. When John saw the lamb's followers standing on Mount Zion (14:1), it was likely because they symbolized the citizens of the new Zion. Revelation portrays two cities: first, the city of the present evil empires, this present world, portrayed as Babylon the prostitute, decorated with gold and pearls (17:3-5).⁵⁶ Those without faith to await the future city settle for the prostitute. But those who keep themselves chaste (like the 144,000, in Rev 14:4) await a better city, New Jerusalem the bride, whose very streets are gold and her gates are pearls (21:2, 10-11, 18-21). This world is nothing compared to the world to come!

Ancient cities always had temples, but John says, "I saw no temple there ..." (21:16).⁵⁷ In a city whose gates were named for the twelve tribes and its foundation stones for the twelve apostles, Jew and Gentile together worship God and the lamb in the fullness of their glory forever and ever. The city of God for the people of God includes all who follow the lamb.

Conclusion

⁵⁵To compensate, some translations assign the cubit measure to the wall's thickness (see Ezek 41:9, 12; see Aune, *Revelation* [3 vols.; WBC 52, 52b, 52c; Dallas: Word, 1997], 1162), but this is still utterly disproportionate from an ancient or even modern engineering standpoint.

⁵⁶I do agree with those who see Babylon through the lens of Rome, because Rome was the "Babylon" of John's day (having destroyed Jerusalem like Babylon of old, and becoming even a Jewish cipher for Rome; see 1 Pet 5:13; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159-61; *4 Ezra* 3:1-2, 28; *2 Bar.* 11:1-2; 67:7). But the very use of the symbolic title "Babylon" also looks beyond Rome, epitomizing more generally evil empire (i.e., what is analogous to Babylon).

⁵⁷This contrasts starkly with ancient Jewish expectations (*Jub.* 1:27-29; *1 En.* 90:28-29; *Sib. Or.* 3.702-6; *m. Ab.* 5:20; *Taan.* 4:8; fully Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 102).

How central is our unity in Christ? It is central enough to transcend all other loyalties, so that loyalty to Christ as Lord entails loyalty to one another as God's family, above all ethnic, cultural, and earthly kinship connections. It is central enough that Paul repeatedly emphasizes it as a necessary corollary of the gospel. It is central enough that the worship that God desires is a united worship of believers from many different peoples and languages. We are different, bringing diverse cultural gifts; but we are one, for God, the Lord whom we worship, is One.⁵⁸

⁵⁸I evoke here the Shema (Deut 6:4), a fundamental principle of Judaism (cf. e.g., *Let. Aris.* 131-32; *m. Ber.* 1:1 and passim; *Tam.* 5:1; *Sipre Deut.* 31.4.1; William Oscar Emil Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 42-46; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1979), 1:19-36, 400-2) and a basic presupposition of NT theology (Mk 12:29; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:6; Jms 2:19).