

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Status of Gentiles

The entire book of Ephesians is all about the believer's identity in the Messiah. In counseling sessions with people struggling with identity issues or depression, I often “prescribe” a regular and frequent “dose” of the entire book of Ephesians. Herein we learn we are chosen, adopted, forgiven, redeemed, sealed, and have assurance. For those who respond well to “daily affirmations”, it is a rewarding place to invest some time and reflections.

Let's look at the text in Ephesians chapter 2 and see what is revealed regarding believing gentiles. I have included the chapter in full with some highlights as focus points prior to the comments.

“You **were** made alive when you **were** dead in transgressions and sins, in which you **once** walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. We also all **once** lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were** by nature

children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we **were** dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Messiah—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Messiah Yeshua, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Messiah Yeshua; for by grace you **have been** saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that **once** you, the **Gentiles** in the flesh, who are called “uncircumcision” by that which is called “circumcision” (in the flesh, made by hands), that you **were** at that time **separate from Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise**, having **no hope** and **without God** in the world. **But now** in Messiah Yeshua you who **once were far off** are **made near** in the blood of Messiah. For he is our peace, who **made both one**, and broke down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in his flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances¹, that he might create in himself **one new man of the two**, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross,

having killed the hostility through it. He came and preached peace to you who **were far off** and to those who were near. For through him, we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are **no longer strangers and foreigners**, but you are **fellow citizens with the holy ones and of the household of God**, being built on the foundation of the emissaries and prophets, Messiah Yeshua himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”

Ephesians 3:1-7 continues the thought, “For this cause I, Paul, am the prisoner of Messiah Yeshua on behalf of you Gentiles, if it is so that you have heard of the administration of that grace of God which was given me toward you, how that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in few words, by which, when you read, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Messiah, which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy emissaries and prophets in the Spirit, that the **Gentiles** are **fellow heirs** and **fellow members of the body**, and **fellow partakers of his promise** in Messiah Yeshua through the Good News, of which I was made a servant according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power.”

This is a powerful text that speaks specifically to gentile believers and to their place in the kingdom of God. I highlighted certain words to emphasize the **past tense** nature and the **present tense** after coming to faith.

Before

- Were dead in transgressions and sins.
- Once walked according to the course of this world.
- Once lived in the lusts of your flesh.
- Were by nature children of wrath.
- Were dead through your trespasses.
- Separate from Messiah.
- Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.
- Strangers from the covenants of God's promise.
- In this world without hope.
- Without God.
- Once “far off”.

After

- Were made alive.
- By grace, you have been saved.
- Raised up with Him.
- Made to sit with Him in the heavenly places.
- His workmanship.
- Have Messiah.
- Made us both one.
- Fellow heirs.
- Fellow members of the body,
- Fellow partakers of His promise in Messiah.
- Fellow citizens of the holy ones and of the household of God.
- No longer foreigners and strangers.

- Have hope.
- Members of God's family.
- Now “brought near”.

In establishing the truth of how believing gentiles are grafted into the flock of believing Jews, it is important to understand this in terms of what is called progressive revelation. These statements by Paul to the Ephesians are not to be understood as a change in God's overall plan, as previously refuted, but quite the opposite. There is **continuity** represented here as opposed to **contrast**. God's plan for the redemption of mankind has always envisioned a place for gentiles alongside Jews. It goes all the way back to the Abrahamic covenant and even before.

In Ephesians 3:2 Paul refers to “the administration of that grace of God which was given me toward you” and “how that by revelation the **mystery** was made known to me”. What is this mystery Paul was talking about? The key to understanding is found in his next statement “The **mystery** of Messiah, which in other generations **was not made known** to the children of men, **as it has now been revealed** to his holy emissaries and prophets in the Spirit”. This mystery is not the creation of something new or a change in God's preordained plan. The word mystery refers to something not previously revealed to

those generations but now is revealed to this generation. The death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah were preordained by God before the creation of the world. His desire and plan to redeem mankind had already been established in God's mind. What Paul says is now revealed is "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of his promise in Messiah Yeshua through the Good News". Paul further describes this as "the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God". Moreover, Paul further states "that now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places".

Paul is giving an example of progressive revelation of a previously established fact, namely, God's overall plan of salvation which always envisioned the inclusion of gentiles alongside Jews through faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah.

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1. The Greek word for "dogma" always refers to man-made traditions, likely the traditions of men, the Oral Torah, not the Written Torah.