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First century Greek inscription from Jerusalem's Temple Mount forbidding entry of Gentiles to the Temple inner court, reading *"..no foreigner shall enter."* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

the Temple Series **the Dividing Wall**

by haRold Smith
a citizen of the Commonwealth
(Ephesians 2:19)

"Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without Elohim in the world: But now in Messiah Yeshua you who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Messiah. He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of partition (or hostility) between us 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 YHVH in One Body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (or enmity)." Ephesians 2:11-16

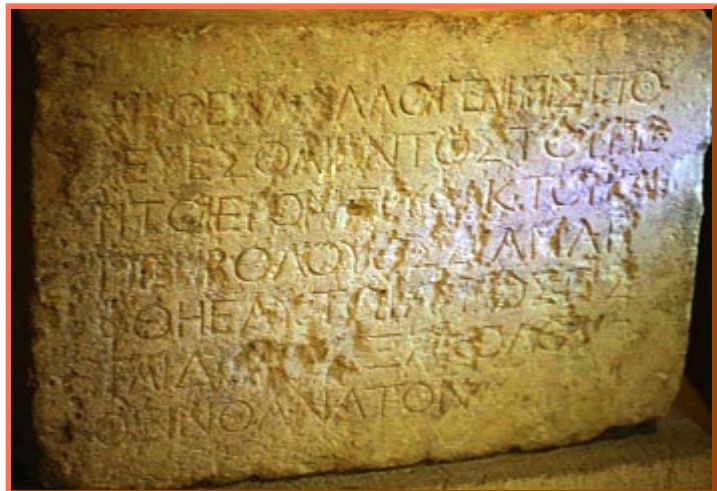
So, just what is the "the dividing wall of hostility" Yeshua broke down between us? Taken at face value, English translations present the text as a pointed assertion by the Hebrew apostle *Sha'ul* (Paul) that Messiah abolished the Mosaic Torah by His death and that the Torah was the instrument of hostility that erected a dividing wall between Hebrew and Gentile. The difficulty with such a reading is twofold: first, it contradicts the clear teaching of Yeshua Himself that He did not abolish the written Torah ([Matthew 5:17](#)) and, secondly, the written Torah never demanded a wall between Hebrew and Gentile. The English term translated "broke down" found in Ephesians 2 above is actually the single Greek word, *luo* ([click on highlighted words to view content](#)) which can mean "to loose, untie, set free, break up, destroy, bring to an end, abolish, or do away with". It is used of the demolition of buildings, as in the saying of Yeshua regarding the Temple in [John 2:19](#) or of the destruction of the ship on which *Sha'ul* was traveling in [Acts 27:41](#). The compound form of this word, *kataluo*, is used by Yeshua in Matthew 5:17 (earlier). Ephesians 2:16 further defines the use of *luo* by adding *"having put to death the enmity (hostility created) by it."* Contextually, the abolishing action is viewed as final - as a death. Thus, the barrier is done away with forever. But, how could that be if the temple was still standing after Yeshua's resurrection and at the time of this writing by the Hebrew apostle *Sha'ul* to the Ephesians?

It is important to recognize how the very structure of our language subtly alters how we understand the text of scripture. Hebrew does not work like English or any of the Indo-European languages of which we are familiar. First, it has no vowels. Secondly, the structure of the Hebrew letters communicates a second level of meaning impossible to translate and, third, the syntax of Hebrew is strikingly different than other languages. Even though the only documents we have of the Messianic Writings (NT) are in Greek, they were still written by Hebrews out of a Hebrew mindset influenced through Hebrew culture producing a uniquely Hebrew perspective that were addressed to, primarily, a Hebrew audience who had an intimate understanding of the nuances contained in the Hebrew language. To truly grasp what these Hebrews were trying to communicate, means we must first understand the perspective these words were written from.

When once asked what an expert was, Mark Twain quipped, *"Someone from out of town."* It seems some "expert" Christian theologians have assumed the barrier spoken of in this text in Ephesians 2 above is the low

wall which separated the clean from the unclean courts in the Temple, known as the **Soreg**. The wall was designed to partition access to the area for worship preserved for the Israelites and separated access from the gentile. This was a literal interpretation of the intent of Num 1:51: *"and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up and the stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death"*. The wall or "soreg" was described as being "a few steps" high by Josephus (**Josephus Antiquities: 15.11.5**). Along the top of this wall at regular intervals were placed stones (as depicted in the photo below) which were interspaced with lattice-work or "a reticulated fence of sticks" ten hand-breadths high which was perforated by 12 gates. The photographed stone was discovered by Clermont and Ganneau in 1871 at the northwestern corner of the graveyard abutting the temple mount wall. The court-styled "*hieron*" (Hebrew) or "sacred place" (English) this low wall protected is referred to in **John 2:14**. However, in the Ephesians 2 passage the Greek word translated "dividing wall", **mesotoichon**, only appears this one time in the Messianic Writings; so, further definition must be sought outside of the biblical text. The Greek word translated "partition" or "barrier" in this passage is **phragmos**, found three other times in the Messianic Writings with all using the same sense of a barrier consisting of a "fence" surrounding something. However, the balustrade preventing Gentiles and unclean-Israelites from proceeding into the court of the circumcised was **never** so designated in contemporary usage, nor is it labeled **phragmos** or **mesotoichon** by any ancient writer (Josephus calls the separating wall in the Temple court *drufaktos lithinos* meaning "fence of stone" (*ibid, Josephus 15.11.5*, and Philo also calls the wall *drufaktos [leg. ad Gaium 31]*). More importantly, in the inscription engraved on the balustrade itself (pictured below), the wall is also referred to by this different Greek term: *"No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade (Greek **drufaktou**) around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death."* (E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63BCE-66CE*, Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 61). If *Sha'ul* had intended his readers to understand it was the **physical** wall within the Temple which separated clean from unclean to be what Messiah destroyed, the **common** Greek term, **drufaktou** (something doubtlessly seen time and time again entering the Temple), would certainly have been used. Plus, it seems unlikely that *Sha'ul* would teach the **present** reality of peace between Hebrew and Gentile on the basis of Messiah's having **already abolished** the physical separating wall in the Temple if, in fact, it were still standing! Why, then, would the Greek phrasing **mesotoichon tou phragmou** (translated as "the dividing wall of partition") be used; unless - there was another point being made?

There is an acknowledged Rabbinical injunction regarding **a fence around the Torah**, as in *Avot*: "...They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a **fence** round the Law" (**m.Avot 1.1**, also *b.Chullin 110a*; *b.Yebamot 20a*). That injunction was then expanded on by another commentator of scripture: "Rabbi Akiba said, Jestng and levity habituate [a man] to lewdness. [The] Tradition is a **fence to the Law**; tithes are a fence to riches; vows are fence to abstinence; a fence to wisdom is silence" (**m.Avot 3.13**). Yeshua spoke to the result of tradition in **Mark 7:9-13** and was constantly holding up the clear words of Torah to break down the artificial barriers men's traditions had built contrary to those words. Additionally, the Greek term *phragmos* ("fence") was commonly used in the 1st Century to identify the **oral Torah** (the *Talmud*) as a "wall" or "fence" around the written Torah and the Pharisees as "builders of the wall". Finally, it was aspects of the oral Torah, not the written Torah, which laid the foundation for **a strict separation** between ethnic and non-ethnic Hebrews. The Ephesian text before us helps define the dividing wall with the phrase "the law of commandments **in ordinances**", **ton nomon tOn entolOn en dogmasin** (rather than all the prior usages in the Messianic Writings of **ha nomos** - "the law"), to denote those Rabbinic ordinances which had been, in fact, the obstacle of separation, the "fence" of **dogma** found at the end of this phrase.



Greek stone tablet discovered by Clermont and Ganneau in 1871 at the northwestern corner of the graveyard abutting the temple mount wall and attached to the Soreg forbidding Gentiles to pass beyond that point. It reads: "No foreigner is allowed in the courtyard and within the wall surrounding the temple. Whoever enters will invite death for himself!"
Istanbul Archeological museum

Messianic believers should be encouraged to accept the *mitzvot* of the Torah and live a Torah lifestyle. But the scriptures command us to do this together as a community of Hebrews and non-Hebrews. To suggest that Hebrews have an obligation to Torah which Gentiles do not is to suggest something foreign to the thrust of the Prophets and the Apostles. We dare not take that which YHVH has given to all His people, and

relegate it to a select group on the basis of the non-biblical teaching of "unique callings." But this means we will have to die to ourselves at times, as we bear with those who not only disagree with us, but are even at times antagonistic toward us. There is nothing more difficult than "dying daily" toward another of the community - yet, this is the life to which we are called. **This very issue** was a hotly contested one in the 1st Century Messianic community. The "influencers" that *Sha'ul* dealt with in Galatians and 2Corinthians (among other of the Epistles) have been often misrepresented. There is very little evidence (if any at all) that "salvation by works" was a major tenant of the 1st Century Judaisms. The primary issue which raged among the Messianic communities of *Sha'ul's* day was whether or not YHVH intended to bless the Gentiles as a separate community or as part of the Hebraic community. It is to this issue Ephesians 2:14-16 (as well as many other texts) speaks.

A study of the Greek word, **dogma**, in both the LXX and Messianic Writings confirms that the term was used of man-made ordinances and not of the YHVH-given Torah of Sinai (in spite of Strong's inference). We may therefore conclude that *Sha'ul* adds it to his description of (*nomos*, "law") in order to identify the abolished ordinances as the legal fence of the Rabbis, particularly the parts of the oral Torah that separated ethnic and non-ethnic Hebrews and, thus, were at odds with the written Torah that prophesied the unity within the promise of **blessing given to Abraham**. This does not mean the entire oral Torah was abolished. In fact, there are many instances recorded in the life of Yeshua where He gives clear allegiance to oral Torah. What Yeshua abolished were those Rabbinic ordinances which, when practiced, set aside the Torah of YHVH by separating ethnic and non-ethnic Hebrews that YHVH always intended to make **one in Messiah**. This was the "dividing wall - the (Rabbinic) law contained in the ordinances (of the oral Torah)." Those parts of the oral Torah that affirm the written Torah or are in harmony with it remain viable for the Messianic faithful as the **traditions of the fathers**.

Thus, when all the words are looked at together from the Hebraic perspective they were written in, we find no contradictions within the writings of *Sha'ul*; instead, **scriptures show** Yeshua, *Sha'ul* and the rest of the disciples to be in complete alignment with Torah.

*"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, **believing everything laid down by the Law** and written in the Prophets..."*
Acts 24:14

The Temple Series

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the Dividing Wall, a discussion



???Questions???

Please feel free to email me at harold@hethathasaneer.com. While not claiming to have all the answers, it would be an honor to partake with you of what Spirit is uncovering.

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