

## Ask the Rabbi

### Submitted Question #3:

I was reading through the Book of Ephesians, and came across this verse.

Ephesians 2:14-16 (NKJ)

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

How does this fit with your former teaching on Paul and the Law? Specifically, how was the Law a wall between Jews and Gentiles, since the Mosaic Law did not apply to the Gentiles? Also, was Paul saying that the ordinances have been abolished, or is he saying that only the wall has been abolished?

### The Rabbi's Answer:

First of all, I do not agree that the Mosaic Law had no application to the Gentiles. I concede that much of the Law applied to Gentiles differently from how it applied to Israelites, but that all of the Law was relevant to Gentiles in one way or another by application of principle. It is true that the statutes and ordinances of the Law were not enforceable against Gentiles who did not live within the Israelite community, but that does not mean that they were not applicable. If you agree that the Mosaic Law embodied God's standards for human conduct generally, I think you will see what I mean.

The Law might be thought of as a wall because, under the Mosaic Law, Gentiles did not have the same access to the Tabernacle and Temple as did the Israelites. The wall of partition (or separation) referred to in Ephesians 2:14-16, was a physical wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the other parts of the Temple. There is disagreement among scholars as to whether Gentiles could offer sacrifices, but Hullin 13b of *Talmud Bavli* suggests that they could; if so, they must have had to entrust their sacrifices to Israelites who could bring them to the priests, because Gentiles could enter the Temple only so far. Whether they could or could not offer sacrifices, the Temple's wall of partition was symbolic of the unequal standing of Gentiles and Israelites before God, and Ephesians 2:14-16 explains that belief in Messiah Yeshua equalized their standing by creating "one new man" where Jew and Gentile were spiritually equal in Him.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, the Herodian Temple was still standing and functioning, and therefore the physical wall of partition was still in existence. That is why Paul could use the wall as a metaphor without being misunderstood. So, the physical wall was not abolished but, Paul's saying that it was, symbolized the spiritual equality that was established between Jewish and Gentile believers through their common faith in Yeshua.

As for the statutes and ordinances of the Law, Scripture doesn't say that they were abolished, and Paul never treated them as abolished. In fact, Paul continued to perform his duties of sacrifice in

the Temple throughout his life. A question that must be asked, however, is whether God de facto abolished the statutes and ordinances when He allowed the Herodian Temple to be destroyed. Evidence that it might be the case is found in Hebrews 8:13:

*"In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."*

If the covenant came to an end with the destruction of the Temple (or later), everything that was built upon it (including the Mosaic statutory legal system) must also have come to an end. What many have difficulty in appreciating, however, is that God's Law did not vanish even if its statutes and ordinances are no longer enforceable, because God's will and values for mankind are eternal and have been transferred to the New Covenant.

Thank you for your thoughtful question.