

EPHESIANS

Reconciling the Irreconcilable

Ephesians 2:11-16









UNITED NATIONS

Consider:

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The Reality of the Human Race

Outline for Today

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I. The Problem (vv. 11-12)

- 5 Gentile Realities

II. The Solution (vv. 13-16)

- 3 Ways Christ Broke Down the Wall

In the OT...

People are divided into two groups:



Israel and The Nations



These two entities were always diametrically opposed and were almost never at “peace.”

Ephesians 2:11

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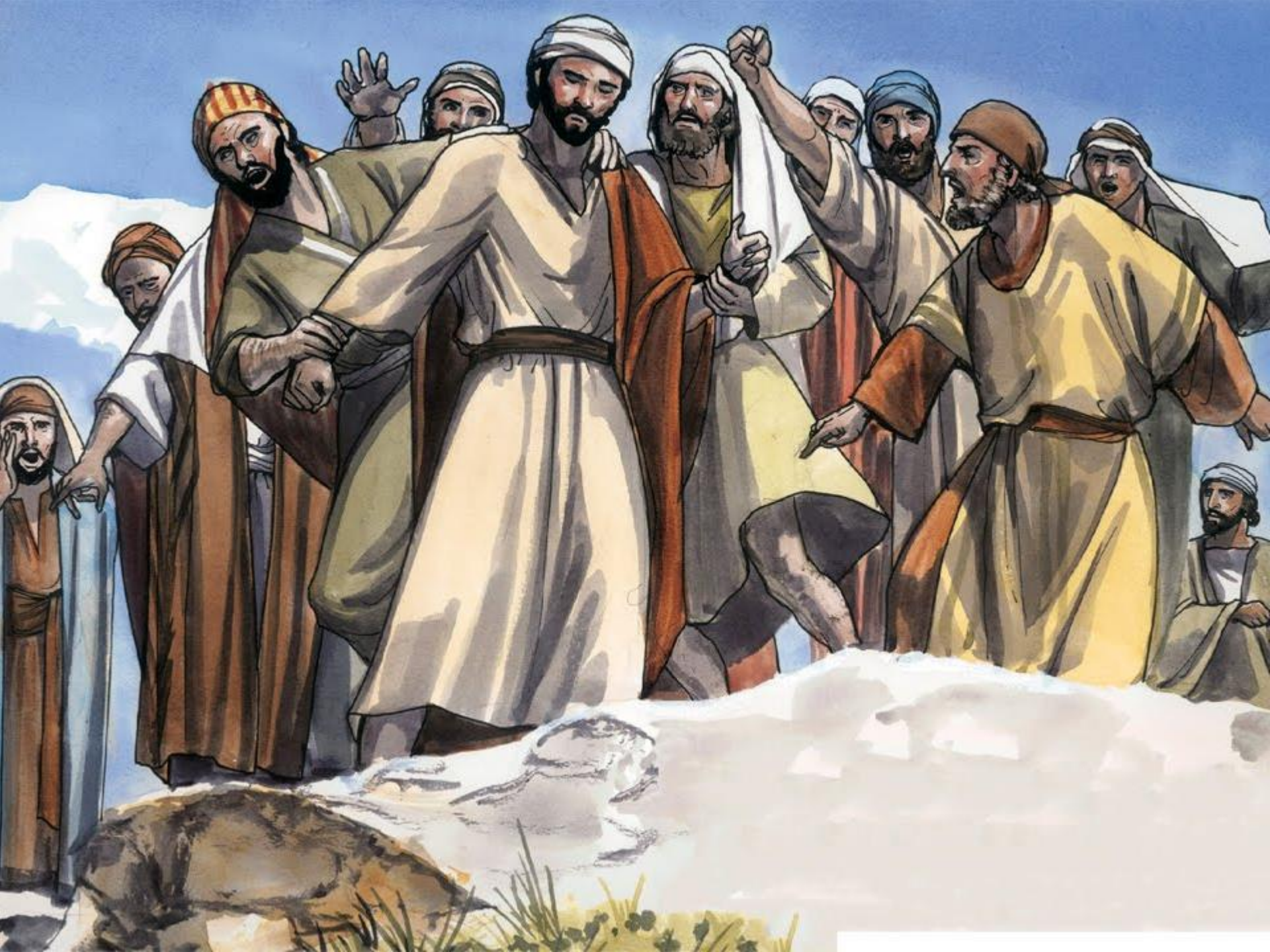
11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—

The “Circumcision”

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- This refers to the Jews who practiced the outward sign of circumcision but displayed no true faith and obedience to God.
- And they looked with contempt at the Gentiles, the “Uncircumcision” because they were not one of God’s chosen people.
- The enmity was great; the separation was absolute.





True “Circumcision”

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- Deuteronomy 10:16 – “So **circumcise your heart**, and stiffen your neck no longer.”
- Deuteronomy 30:6 – “Moreover the Lord your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”
- Jeremiah 4:4 – “**Circumcise yourselves to the Lord And remove the foreskins of your heart**, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.”

Romans 2:28-29

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28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. **29**

But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Ephesians 2:12

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12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

5 Gentile Realities

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1. “separate from Christ”
2. “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel”
3. “strangers to the covenants of promise”
4. “having no hope”
5. “without God in the world”

1. “separate from Christ” EPHESIANS

- They had no corporate national hope centered in a Messiah, as the Jews did.
- This is not simply separation in a physical sense; it is “having no part” in Him or “far from” Him.

2. “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel”

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- Individual Gentiles could become members of the nation of Israel, but as a whole the Gentiles had no part in what God planned to do in and through Israel.
- Their king was not Yahweh.

3. “strangers to the covenants of promise”

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- They had no direct part in the promises of God to Israel contained in the biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic).
- These covenants were exclusive to Israel.

4. “having no hope”

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- Gentiles had no corporate future promised by God to which they could look and in which they could hope, as Israel did.

5. “without God in the world”

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- ἄθεος (*atheos*)
- They were separated from God with no hope of connection.
- In contrast, God had reached out to Israel and drawn her to Himself.

And What's Worse

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They Were Looked
Upon With
Nothing Short Of
Contempt

William Barclay

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“The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles kill. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”



Gentiles Built Walls, Too EPHESIANS

- **Cicero:** “As the Greeks say, all men are divided into two classes—Greeks and barbarians.”
- **Aristotle:** “It [bestiality] is found most frequently among barbarians,” and “the remote tribes of barbarians belong to the bestial class.”
- **Livy:** “The Greeks wage a truceless war against people of other races, against barbarians.”
- **Plato:** “Barbarians are our enemies by nature.”

2:11-12 Tell Us...

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Quite Clearly, There
Are Man-Made
Divisions That
Separate Us From
Love And Unity



13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“But now” (like v. 4!) EPHESIANS

- Because of Jesus Christ’s death, God has brought Gentiles near to Himself and to the Jews in a sense never before true.
- Sin results in death and separation, however, Christ’s obedience resulted in life and reconciliation with other people as well as with God for Gentiles.

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins **by His blood**

Ephesians 2:14

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14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down **the barrier of the dividing wall,**

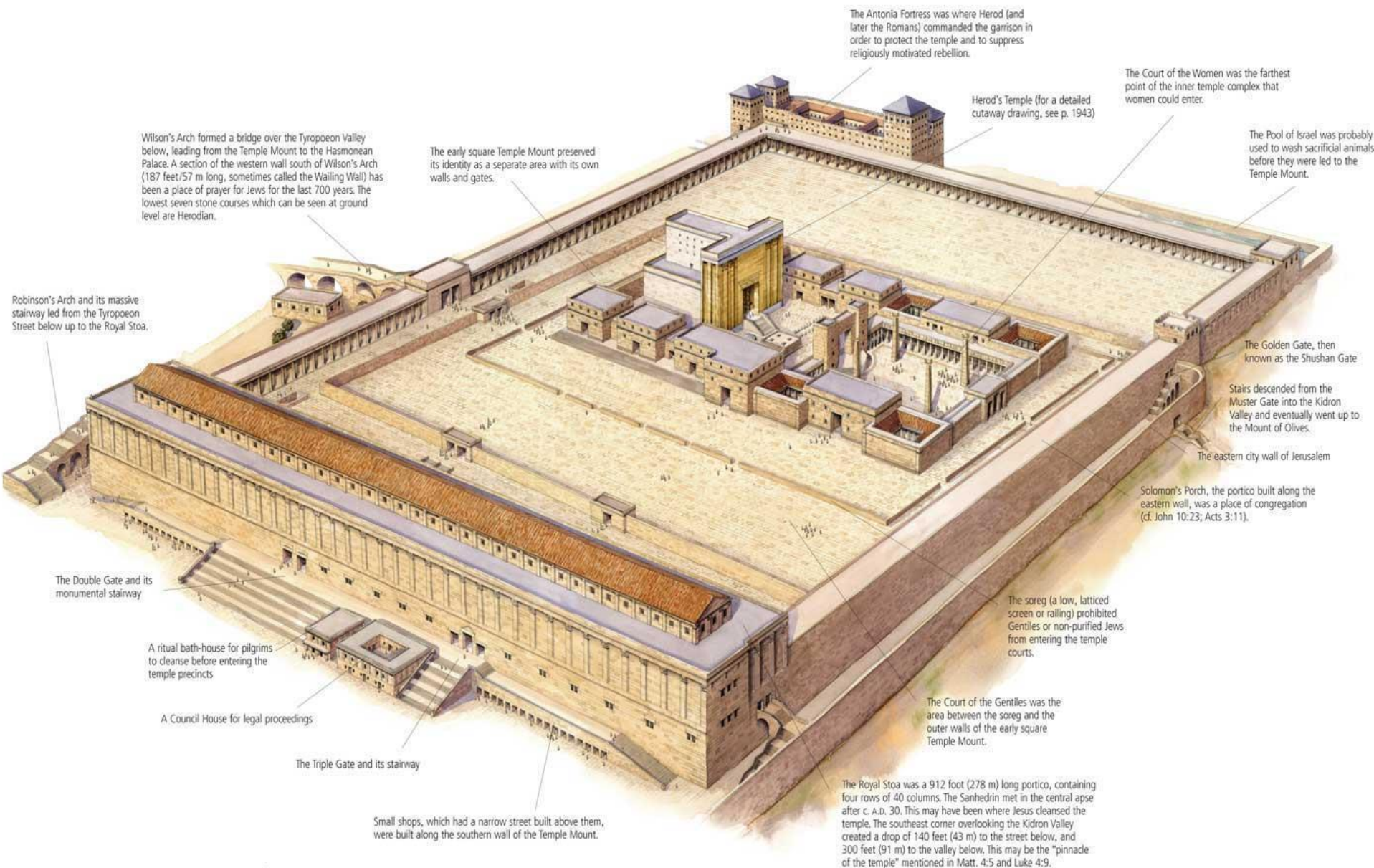
The What?

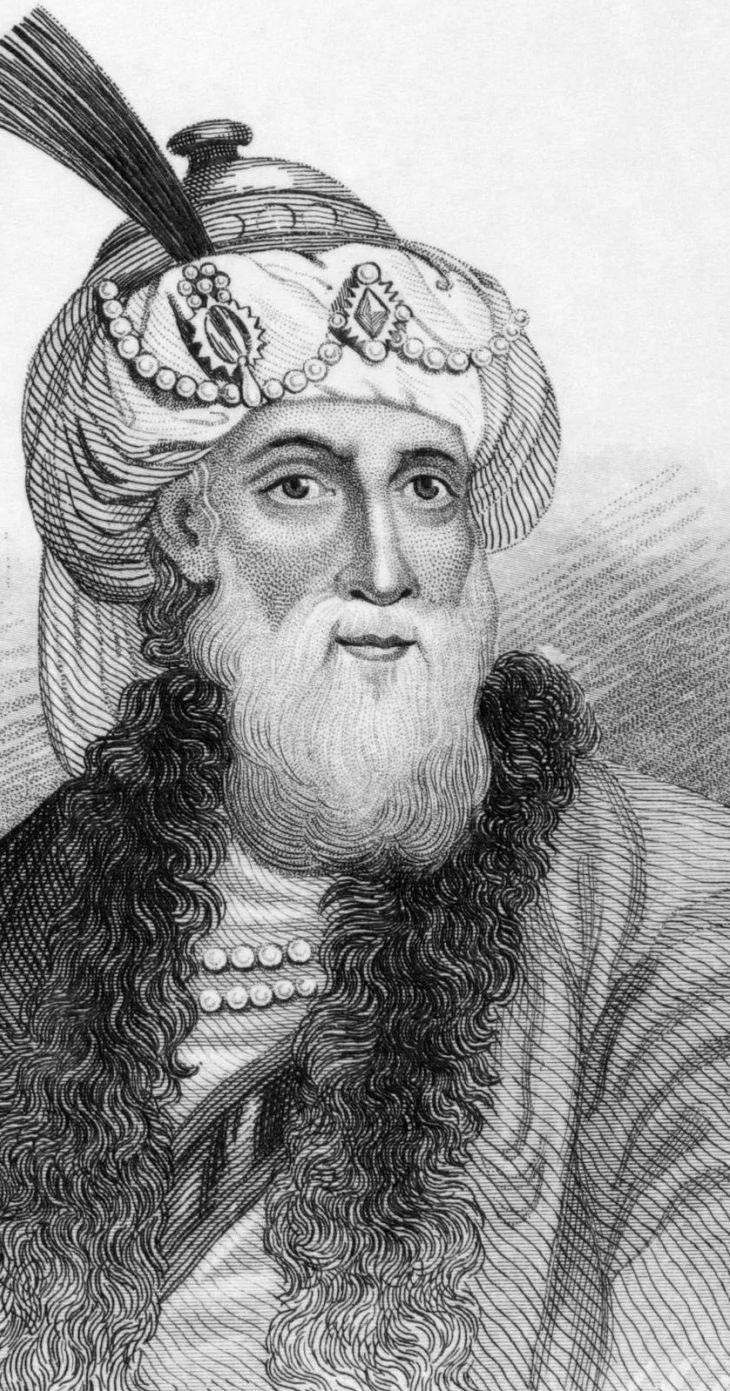
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- **ESV, CSB, NIV:** “the dividing wall of hostility”
- **NLT:** “the wall of hostility that separated us”
- **KJV, NET:** “the middle wall of partition”

If this were simply a metaphor, the wall imagery is appropriate to signify a separation.

However, Paul has something specific in mind.



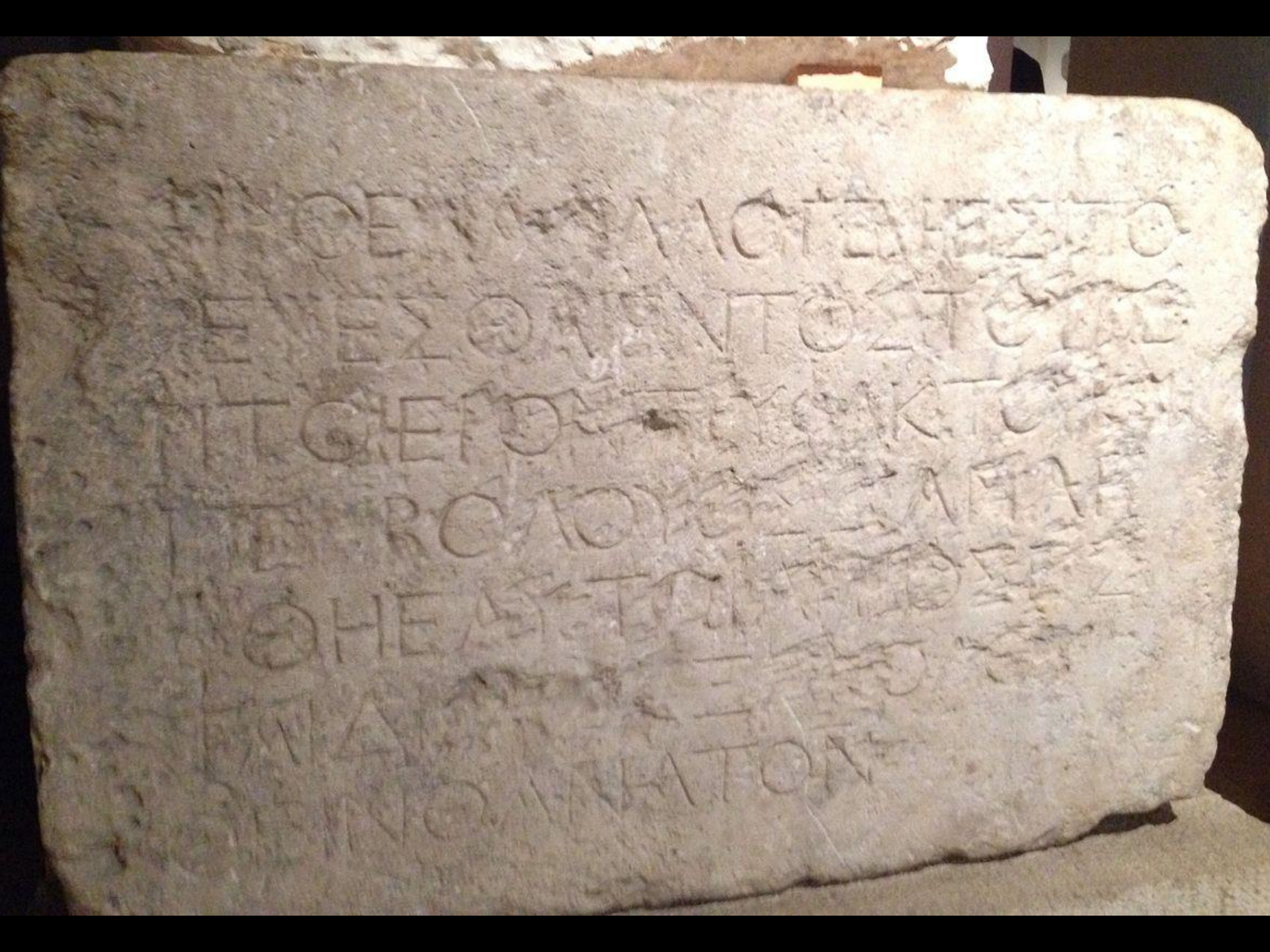


Josephus Tells Us:

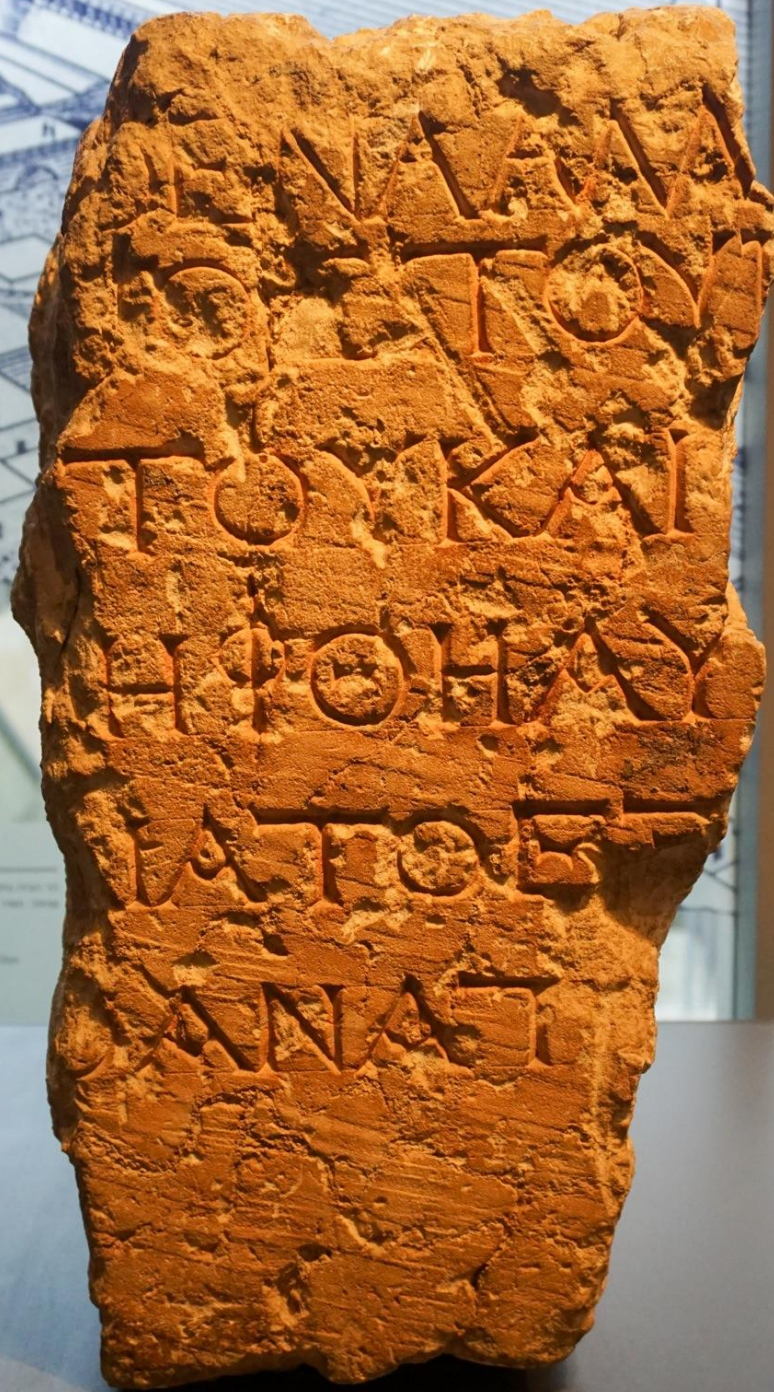
“When you go through these [first] passages, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits...upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that ‘no foreigner should go within the sanctuary’”



Acts 21



IN GEN. V. A. C. T. E. S. T. O
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N. O. H. E. A. T. T. I. O. N. E. Z.
T. W. A. N. A. T. O. N.
P. O. T. I. N. O. A. N. A. T. O. N.



Fragment of a terracotta tablet, 9th-8th century BC.
The fragment is from the
collection of the
British Museum, London.

Soreg Inscription

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NO FOREIGNER IS TO GO
BEYOND THE BALUSTRADE
AND THE PLAZA OF THE
TEMPLE ZONE WHOEVER IS
CAUGHT DOING SO WILL
HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME
FOR HIS DEATH WHICH WILL
FOLLOW

What's the Big Deal

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With Gentiles
Coming to
Salvation?

The Problem:

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The wall may be destroyed, but my natural self does not lead me to love someone who has been considered a foreigner and an outsider for my entire life.

What did God do about this problem?

3 Ways Christ Broke Down the Wall

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1. He Abolished the Law
2. He Created a New
Humanity
3. He Reconciled the New
Humanity to God

1. He Abolished the Law EPHESIANS

15 by abolishing in His flesh
the enmity, which is the Law
of commandments
contained in ordinances, so
that in Himself He might make
the two into one new man, thus
establishing peace,

But...Matthew 5:17-19 EPHESIANS

17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. **18** For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. **19** Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

And...Romans 10:4

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4 For Christ is the end
of the law for
righteousness to
everyone who believes.

What Did He Abolish? EPHESIANS

“the Law of commandments contained
in ordinances”

“Ordinances” - δόγμα (*dogma*)

For example, ceremonial washings,
dietary restrictions, feasts, the Sabbath.

2. He Created a New Humanity

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15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, **so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man,** thus establishing peace,

In Greek...

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- There are two words for new.

1. νέος (*neos*)

- Which is new simply in terms of time; a thing which is *neos* has come into existence recently.

2. καινός (*kainos*)

- Which means new in terms of quality; a thing which is *kainos* is new in the sense that it brings into the world a new quality in itself which did not exist before.

Paul Uses *kainos*

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- He says that Jesus brings together Jew and Gentile and from them both produces one new kind of person.
- It is not that Jesus makes all the Jews into Gentiles, or all the Gentiles into Jews; he produces a new kind of person out of both, although they remain Gentiles and Jews.



John Chrysostom

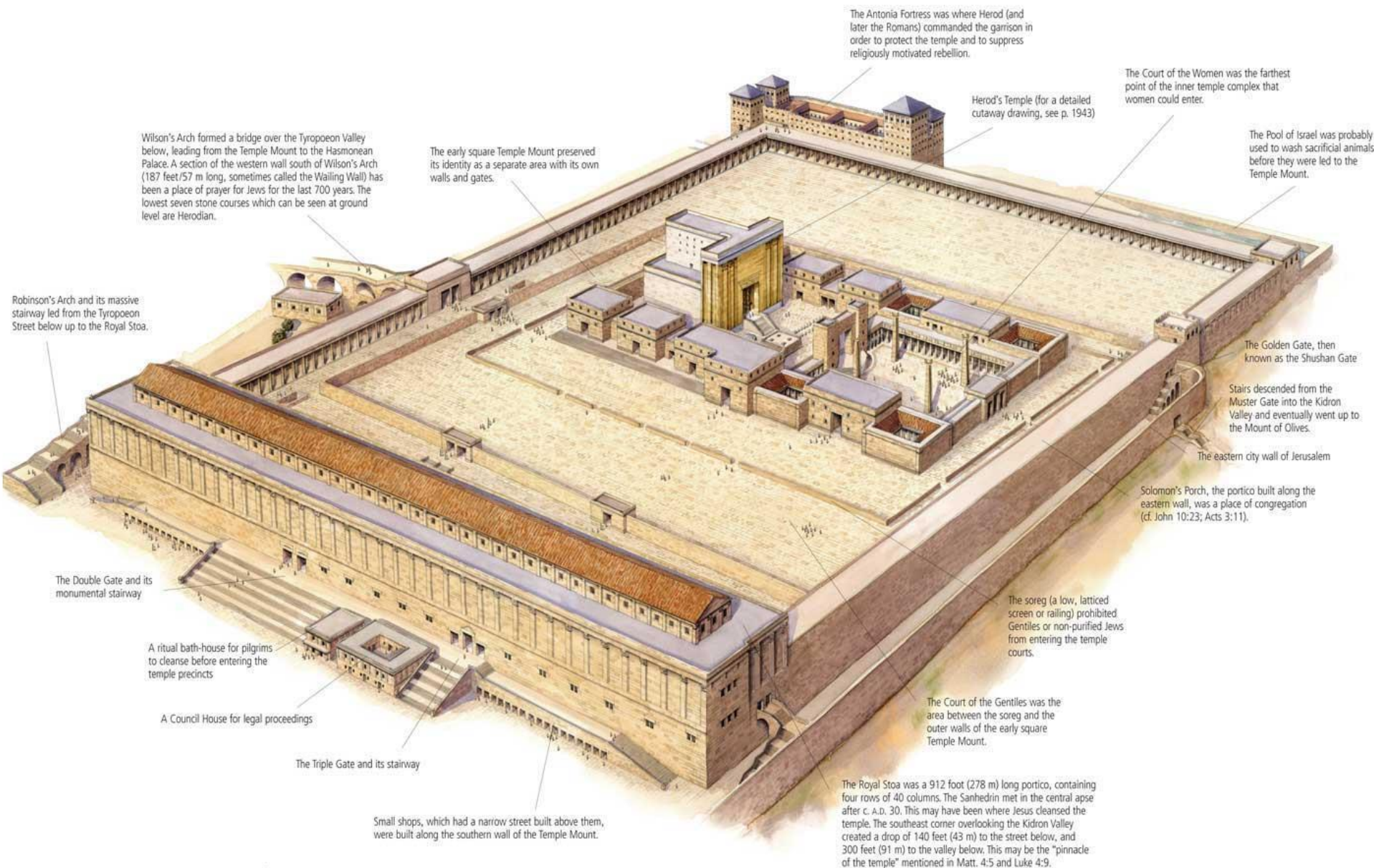
“It is as if one should melt down a statue of silver and a statue of lead, and the two should come out gold.”

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

3. He Reconciled the New Humanity to God

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16 and might **reconcile**
them both in one body
to God through the
cross, by it having put to
death the enmity.

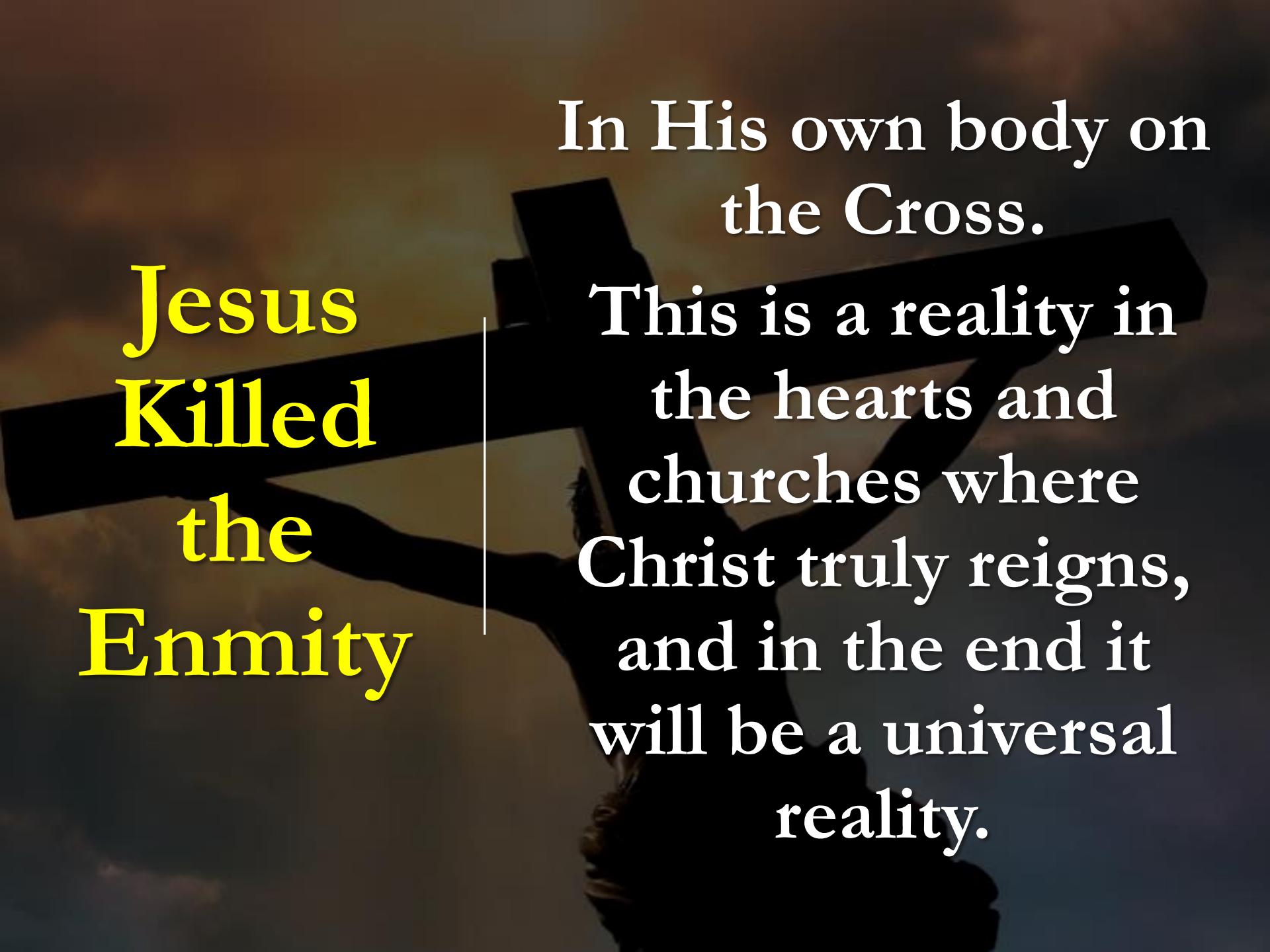




And Not Only...

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- Are we reconciled to one another, more importantly, we are reconciled to God!
- We were separated; we were estranged; we once walked in the cool of the evening with God; but sin had made a rift between us that could not be overcome.
- Until the Cross...



Jesus
Killed
the
Enmity

In His own body on
the Cross.

This is a reality in
the hearts and
churches where
Christ truly reigns,
and in the end it
will be a universal
reality.

Revelation 7:9-10

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9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; **10** and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Enmity is Removed

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We not only become peers or friends

We are adopted into the same family

We have the same Father

We serve the same Lord

We share the same saving faith

We look forward to the same eternity!

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