

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

Introduction

Jeffrey J. Niehaus argues convincingly in his *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* that a regular and repeating pattern of salvation occurs in the Ancient Near East (ANE). He writes, “The basic structure of the idea is this:”

A god works through a man (a royal or prophetic figure, often styled a shepherd) to wage war against the god’s enemies and thereby advance his kingdom. The royal or prophetic protagonist is in a covenant with the god, as are the god’s people. The god establishes a temple among his people, either before or after the warfare, because he wants to dwell among them. This can mean the founding (or choice) of a city, as well as a temple location. The ultimate purpose is to bring into the god’s kingdom those who are not part of it.¹

Developing this basic schema, Niehaus demonstrates how the Old Testament and New Testament recapitulate this eschatological temple-building motif.² This pattern can be witnessed in the life of Moses, when YHWH calls the reluctant shepherd to defeat Pharaoh and liberate Israel, with the ultimate goal of tabernacle worship with God’s covenant people. Moreover, in the life of David, YHWH summons a shepherd to crush the head of the enemy, to free the people of Israel, and to establish his covenant people in the land—a land where YHWH has set his name. The culminating act of temple-building in 1 Kings is the high point of the OT, and sets the stage for a greater Spirit-anointed, Divine warrior/savior, who will construct the final dwelling place for God in the NT.

¹Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 30.

²For a compelling treatment of temple-imagery in the Bible, see G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A biblical theology of the dwelling place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

As to this pattern in the NT, Niehaus writes,

God wages war through his Son and prophet, the Good Shepherd, Jesus, against the powers of darkness. He liberates people from those powers and establishes them as his people by a new covenant. He establishes a temple presence, not only among them but in them (the church and individually its members).³ They look forward to a heavenly city (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21:2). Theologically, it is important to remember that these people were God's enemies...until he waged warfare, set them free from their vassaldom to sin, and established his covenant with them, making them his own vassals...Christ is also Creator or Co-creator. He creates a "new heaven and a new earth," with a temple presence that recalls Eden with its river and tree of life."⁴

Reading the Bible along these lines, it becomes apparent that the God of the Bible works in a regular and repeating way throughout redemptive history, and that the NT writers were conscious of these biblical-theological structures and interweaved them into the very fabric of their thinking, preaching,⁵ and writing.⁶ The book of Ephesians is no different, and in regard to temple-imagery in the NT before Revelation, Ephesians 2:19-22 one of the highest peaks.⁷

Moreover, in comparison with the pattern suggested by Niehaus, it becomes remarkably clear that the very same order of operations that occurs in the OT is at work in Ephesians 2. Namely, that God takes initiative to save a people (2:8-9), by sending his Son⁸ to die for sinners and defeat enemies (2:4-7, 14-15a; 6:10-20; cf. Col. 2:14-15), so that he can establish a new community with whom he can dwell forever (2:15b-16, 18-22). The Exodus-like

³Ibid., 31.

⁴Ibid., 31-32.

⁵Cf. Stephen in Acts 7; Paul in Acts 13, 17.

⁶See David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) and Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997) for two examples of reading the NT in light OT Exodus themes.

⁷David Peterson, "The New Temple: Christology and Ecclesiology in Ephesians and 1 Peter" in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 161-76.

⁸Consider the "in Christ" language of Ephesians with the central focus on him in verses like 1:10, 20-23 and 3:11.

outline that runs through the Bible runs through the middle of Ephesians and grounds Paul's letter in a much larger story of redemption. For the sake of space, this paper will focus on the community-establishing and temple-building section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, namely 2:19-22.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Moving into the last section of Paul's excursus on the amazing salvation offered in Christ, Paul recounts the positional change effected by the salvific plans of God (Eph. 2:4-9) and the reconciling work of Jesus Christ (2:11-18).⁹ Summarizing what was said earlier in verses 11-13, Paul lists the beneficent effects of being in covenant with God through Jesus Christ in verse 19. Then in verses 20-22, Paul articulates the way in which the ultimate *telos* of salvation is a life lived in God's presence—the access mentioned in verse 18 is for the purpose of dwelling. Mixing metaphors, Paul speaks of the church growing and being built into the temple of God, the final resting place for God and man. Salvation is not simply an eschatological experience for the Christian. Better yet, the eschaton has already come in Christ, and those who are new creations in him (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17) will progressively experience edification until the end of the age. For our purposes here, we will consider these verses in order, mentioning clausal connections as we go.

⁹These are not set at odds, but rather complement one another. The difference is a matter of literary emphasis and attention, not instrumental operation. As Ephesians 1:3-14 demonstrates, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equally instrumental in salvation. Paul's distinction is that of role, not responsibility, and in Ephesians 2:11-22, the spotlight is on the Son, even while the radiating glow illumines the Father and the Son.

ἄρα οὖν. Paul connects verse 19 to the previous section¹⁰ with a resultant conjunction, “so then.” “The word marks the progress in the argument and has a connective sense implying a consequence. The double particles (*ara oun*) in combination are intended to imply logical connection, the one simply reinforcing the other, with both used to sum up the argument of the whole section.”¹¹ The point Paul seems to be making is that the multifaceted estrangement that describes the Gentiles in verses 11-12 has been changed by the peace-making work of Christ in verses 13-18. In fact, the immediate mention of “access” in verse 18 stands as the ultimate aim of Christ’s work on the cross. Unlike before, Jews and Gentiles now “have access in one Spirit to the Father.” What follows in verses 19-22 is an expansion on the meaning of this holy access.

οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι. In verse 19, Paul uses two *eimi* verbs. He asserts who the Gentiles are and who they are not. First, he states negatively that the Gentiles are “no longer foreigners and aliens,” *xenoi* and *paroikoi* (v. 19). This corresponds with and synthesizes the five-fold description in verses 11-12. Before, in highlighting the Gentiles former condition, “remember that *formerly*...that you were *at that time*” (v. 11-12), Paul detailed the Gentiles spiritual poverty, as they were (1) without Christ, (2) alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, (3) strangers to the covenants of promise, (4) without hope, and (5) without God. Consequently, they were “far” from the covenant Lord of Israel (v. 13).¹² Now in verse 19, Paul

¹⁰BDAG indicates that the word commonly draws attention to what was just said, as it does in this case, and that with the *oun, ara* expresses the inference and *oun* the transition; cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 127.

¹¹Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 438.

¹²The spatial imagery of “near and far” permeate this entire section (v. 11-22). Paul uses this language explicitly in verses 13 and 17. These twin conceptions pick up an important covenantal expression of blessing and

summarizes this list as a way of reminder, but with emphatic assertion, he declares that they are “no longer strangers and aliens.”

Of the two words that Paul uses in verse 19 to summarize his previous description, one of them, *xenoi*, is an exact reiteration (v. 12); the other, *paraoikoi*, is a nominal synonym of the participle, *apellotriomenoi*. The question becomes, should we read these two descriptions together as one, or as two similar but distinct descriptions? Lincoln dismisses any lexical distinction between the words. He decides this based on the fact that the Hebrew word *ger* in the LXX is translated by both words.¹³ Nevertheless, as Hoehner points out, the number of times each word is used in LXX is too limited to flatten their meanings and deny distinction.¹⁴ Instead, Hoehner likens the two types of “strangers” to that of a “tourist traveling in a foreign land” and a “legal [alien] residing in a foreign country with a residence visa.”¹⁵ One is a distant traveler, the other a resident alien. Hoehner’s illustration is helpful but too amiable; it does not retain the kind of animosity that accompanied these terms and to the hated condition of the Gentiles outside of Israel. Certainly, Paul’s point is not to distinguish between two kinds of alienation in the old age—though lexically I think Hoehner makes a better case than Lincoln; rather, Paul highlights the glorious transference into the beloved Son, the privilege of enjoying household rights as a member of Christ’s covenant people.¹⁶

cursing that can be most readily perceived in the OT by the architecture of the temple and movement of Israel into and out of the Promised Land.

¹³Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 150.

¹⁴Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 392.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 392.

¹⁶However, in his book *Jews, Gentiles, and Ethnic Reconciliation*, Tet-Lim N. Yee does argue that Paul is drawing attention to the “once-now” relationship in political terms, and that the duplication of the terms is actually intensifying the Gentiles previous lost condition. Therefore, he translates the *kai* as emphatic, “So then you are no longer aliens, *not even* resident aliens” ([Cambridge: CUP, 2008], 192).

ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ. Accordingly, Paul then contrasts the former hopeless condition of the Gentiles with their new position of covenant privilege and blessing. Paul states positively that the rights of citizenship have been given to those who were once “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel” (v. 12). It seems apparent that Paul is using political language, *sumpolitai*, in this verse to draw attention to the way the disenfranchised Gentiles have now received legal rights through their union with Christ. Moreover, if O’Brien is correct in his postulation, Paul’s political language hints at the believers newfound status as members of God’s kingdom (cf. Acts 28:23, 31).¹⁷ So that, those who were formerly cut off from the blessings of God (cf. 1:3), have been made fellow-citizens “with the saints.”

The question is, “Who are the saints?” Numerous interpretations have been suggested,¹⁸ but on balance, it seems best to understand these saints as all those who are truly members of God’s household, including OT saints and NT believers.¹⁹ This is how the term *hagioi* is used elsewhere in Ephesians, and since Paul’s view of God’s people is not strictly Jewish anymore, it is coherent to understand this term as a general description of all those who are in Christ.²⁰

¹⁷P.T. O’Brien writes, “Although Paul does not develop the metaphor, he appears to be alluding to citizenship in God’s kingdom. According to Philippians 3:20, believers are attached to a heavenly commonwealth (cf. 1:27), that is, a heavenly kingdom” (*The Letter to the Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 211).

¹⁸Lincoln includes in his list, (1) Israel or the Jews, (2) Jewish Christians, (3) the first Christians seen as a golden generation, (4) all believers, (5) the angels (*Ephesians*, 150-51). Cf. Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Exegesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 277-78.

¹⁹Hoehner 392-94; Lincoln 150-51; O’Brien 211.

²⁰With that said there is still a strong Jewish flavor to the term because of etymological origin and the fact the first-century church was still predominantly Jewish.

Moving from political terminology to familial, Paul concludes verse 19 saying that the new believers are also “members of the household of God,” a phrase that portrays family allegiance and intimacy. Taking *ou theou* to be a genitive of possession, the believer is now one who abides in God’s household (cf. 2:22). *Oikeioi* is used in other contexts to describe family relations and the virtuous necessity of caring for “his household” (1 Tim. 5:8); it is also used as a technical term for the people of God in Christ (Gal 6:10; cf. 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:17).²¹ Yet, Paul is not simply searching for analogies. The household ideal is developed from verse 18, where access is granted to God *the Father*; it extends from Ephesians 1:5 where Paul writes of the believers “adoption as sons through Jesus Christ,” and it anticipates Ephesians 3:14, which praises God as the Father “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” Paul’s point encourages the believer to find security and identity in his or her newfound home.²² The blessed access to God is not simply one of legal privilege, but one of spiritual parentage: The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is now our heavenly father, and the love that God has for the Son is now shared with all those who are “in Christ” (cf. Luke 15:11-32; Rom. 8:14-17).

ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν. Verse 20 expands and describes the “household of God” mentioned at the end of verse 19. Paul uses two participles to explicate the foundation on which the household of God, the church, is built. The first participle, *epoikodomethentes*, states that the church is “built on the foundation of the

²¹1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:17 each make particular reference to God’s household, however the Greek word is *oikos* not *oikeios*. The emphasis in these verses is on the collective “house of God,” as opposed to the meaning of *oikeios*, which stresses the members of the household, cf. BDAG, 694, 698-99.

²²“The effect of Paul’s use of household imagery is to depict the people of God as God’s household, a living and growing family whose life together requires mutuality of service and care, recognition of responsibilities, and a sense of identity, belong and protection” (Philip Towner, “Households and Household Codes” in *The Dictionary of Paul’s Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph Martin, Daniel Reid [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 418).

apostles and the prophets.” Best denotes *epoikodomeo* as a divine passive,²³ whereby “the household of God” does not build itself, but instead is constructed by God himself.²⁴ Moreover, the aorist tense of *epoikodomethentes*, in contradistinction from the present tense verbs in verses 21-22, seems to evidence a singular and immovable foundation to the church.²⁵ So while the church is designed and promised to experience ongoing growth and upbuilding (until its intended completion), the laying of its foundation is a one-time event that needs no replacing or restoring. Hence, a significant moment in Jesus ministry is the selection of the twelve apostles, who would become the very foundation of his new temple (Mark 3:13-14; cf. Rev. 21:14).²⁶

Discussion has been raised at this point about how the foundation relates to the apostles. Syntactically, what kind of genitive is *ton apostolon kai propheton*? Some like Anselm and Aquinas²⁷ have suggested a genitive of possession; however, confusion necessarily results when the apostle and prophet’s possess the foundation which includes Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. In what way could the apostle’s possess Christ?²⁸ Others have suggested,

²³Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 279; cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 397.

²⁴Though, see Ephesians 4:11-16, where Paul speaks of Jesus giving the church gifts—“apostles, prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and the teachers”—to build itself up.

²⁵So Hoehner who writes, “the aorist rather than a present passive participle is used to indicate a summarizing aspect normally referring to past time (aorist participles usually indicate antecedent time to that of the main verb) rather than a repeated action” (*Ephesians*, 399). Anticipating further discussion below about what the foundation is, Hoehner continues, “It is worth noting that the temple’s foundation is not brick and mortar, but flesh and blood. Jesus is building a spiritual temple, he is preparing a people for place. When the new heavens and earth descend in Revelation 21, the bride of Christ, those who have been the living temple on this earth will enter into the presence of God to dwell in the cosmic holy of holies forever and ever.” (399).

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²⁷Cited in Ralph Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 37.

²⁸See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 398 who cites Charles J. Ellicot, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians: with a Critical and Grammatical Commentary, and a Revised Translation*. 5th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), 53.

following the Pauline statements in 1 Corinthians 3, that this genitive is instrumental²⁹ or subjective³⁰ whereby these men are the ones who build the foundation. The problem is that the metaphorical relationships in 1 Corinthians are different than Ephesians 2. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul speaks about the builders and the materials that construct the church, where Jesus is the whole foundation on which their evangelical efforts rest; while in Ephesians, Paul captures a vision of the formation of the entire church, where Jesus is the cornerstone, not the foundation. Consequently, it makes better sense to interpret “of apostles and prophets” as a genitive of apposition, such that the apostles and prophets are, in fact, the foundation itself.³¹ But this raises two further questions: (1) To whom is Paul referring when he lists “apostles and prophets,” and (2) What is foundational about them? Is it something ascribed to their personhood and position in time? Or is it the message they proclaim?

First, to understand what the foundation is, it is necessary to identify the “apostles and prophets.” While on the surface, it would seem simple enough to relate apostles to the New Testament and prophets to the Old Testament,³² further uses of the expression in Ephesians disallow this interpretation. For instance, seven verses later in 3:5, Paul, discussing the revelation that he has received from God about the mystery of Christ says that what was once

²⁹H.A.W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880); K.O. Sandnes, *Paul—One of the Prophets? A Contribution to the Apostle’s Self-Understanding* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991).; cited in P.T. O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 213.

³⁰John Calvin, *Ephesians*, in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 21: 154-55.

³¹O’Brien, 213; Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

³²Ernest Best supplies a lengthy list of interpreters who have opted for this view: “The prophets were taken to be those of the OT by Origen, *Cant* II 1, 11, GCS 8, 157, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Ambrosiaster, Calvin, Beza, Roberts, *Opbou*, 122-9” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 282).

hidden has “now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” In addition to the word order being anachronistic for such a view, Paul decisively places both apostles and prophets on this side of redemptive history. Likewise, Ephesians 4:11 speaks of apostles and prophets as distinct gifts to the church. Thus the foundation of the church is not set on the testimony of the Old and New Testaments, but on the NT figures themselves.³³

Still, this only gets us halfway, because if the apostles and prophets are both New Testament figures, it must be decided who they are. There is little disagreement on the identity of *apostoloi*. From its use in Ephesians 1:1; 3:5; 4:11, as well as its usage in the New Testament,³⁴ it is clear that Paul is referring to the Twelve apostles who were called and commissioned by Christ to carry the message of the gospel to all the nations (Mark 3:13-14; cf. Matt. 28:18-20) and himself as an apostle untimely born (1 Cor. 15:8ff).³⁵ The discussion surrounding *prophetai*, on the other hand, has been voluminous over the last twenty years, triggered primarily by the work of Wayne Grudem.

In his work on prophecy in the New Testament, Wayne Grudem suggests that these two terms refer to one group, “apostle-prophets” or “apostles who prophesy.”³⁶ However, as most commentators agree,³⁷ Grudem supplies an unnatural reading of the “noun-*kai*-noun plural construction” when he conjoins the two terms. In his article on the subject, Wallace points out

³³Interestingly, by saying that the church is founded on the apostles and prophets, Paul indicates that it is not a simple continuation of Israel. Instead, the New Testament apostles and New Testament prophets are the beginning of something new—the household of God is the New Covenant community, a new creation in Christ Jesus (Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 281).

³⁴BDAG, 122.

³⁵So Lincoln 153, O’Brien 214, Hoehner 399.

³⁶Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), esp. 333-346.

³⁷See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 91-100; O’Brien, 214-16; and especially Hoehner, 397-404. Daniel Wallace has a lengthy bibliographic index of all those who have responded to Grudem (*Beyond the Basics*, 285).

that Grudem's interpretation finds no support from other examples in the New Testament.³⁸

Preferably, the two specifications refer to the twelve apostles *and* those NT prophets who both witnessed Christ in the flesh and proclaimed the gospel in his name.³⁹

This leads to the second question concerning the manner in which the apostles and prophets are foundational. Is it correct, as O'Brien posits, that the foundational element of the apostles and prophets is their "normative teaching," or is it something else? Many interpreters side with him and understand the foundation to be the *kerygma* proclaimed by the apostles and prophets. For instance, Stott writes of the "apostles and prophets"

The reference must again be to a small group of inspired teachers, associated with the apostles, who together bore the witness to Christ and whose teaching was derived from revelation and was foundational. In practical terms this means that the church is built on the New Testament Scriptures. They are the church's foundation documents. And just as a foundation cannot be tampered with once it has been laid and the superstructure is being built upon it, so the New Testament foundation of the church is inviolable and cannot be changed by any additions, subtractions or modifications offered by teachers who claim to be apostles or prophets today.⁴⁰

The problem is that the text does not mention Scripture, teaching, God's word, or any other form of doctrine. It is good theology, supported by the general teaching of the New Testament, but it is questionable in this context. While the office of apostle and prophet necessarily involves teaching and instruction, Ephesians 2:11-22 is about people. Ephesians 2:11-13 speaks of the Gentiles as people who were once far off, now brought near; Ephesians

³⁸Concerning this rendering, Daniel Wallace writes, "there are no clear examples of plural *nouns* in TSKS [i.e. article-substantive-kai-substantive] fitting the 'identical' group in the NT, rendering such a possibility here less likely on grammatical grounds" (Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 285). In other words, as Wallace shows in his grammar (270-86), Grudem's interpretation does not find a single example elsewhere in the New Testament. For a more exact study see Wallace's "Semantic Range of the Article-kai-Noun Plural Construction" in *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983), 59-84.

³⁹So F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 304; Best 281-84; O'Brien 214-16, Lincoln 153-54, Stott 107, and especially Hoehner 401-03.

⁴⁰Stott, *God's New Society*, 107.

2:14-18 describes Jesus as the peace-maker who has made one new man out of the two, creating a new humanity “through the cross.”⁴¹ More proximally, while Ephesians 2:19-22 speaks figuratively of God’s temple, it is clear that the household, the foundation, and the cornerstone are all people. Moreover, Hoehner points out that the syntax disallows reading “apostles and prophets” as a synecdoche for teaching or doctrine. He writes,

If it were talking about the doctrine on which the church is built, then there ought to be a present or perhaps a perfect tense to indicate repeated action representing a continuing effect of the teaching throughout the readers’ lives and throughout the centuries of the church. However, if it were talking about persons, it is fitting for the aorist to be used to indicate past time of the apostles and prophets as that first foundation.⁴²

The problem is similar to the interpretation of Matthew 16:18. In the history of interpretation, there have been numerous Protestant scholars who contending with Catholics have argued that Jesus is referring the Peter’s confession, not Peter himself.⁴³ Thus, Jesus should be understood as saying, “On this confession of faith, I will build my church.” The problem is Matthew 16:18 does not say that, and neither does Ephesians 2:20. Concerning the former, which is analogous to the latter, D.A. Carson rightly surmises, “If it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken ‘rock’ to be anything or anyone other than Peter.”⁴⁴ It is better to understand Jesus’

⁴¹ Significantly, the instruments of reconciliation in Ephesians 2:11-22 are flesh and blood, not the written word. In fact, in verse 15, Paul says that God’s law has been torn down through the blood of Jesus Christ. The preached word in verse 17 is a testimony to the peace-making work of Christ; it emphasizes the cross, not the Word. This is not to divorce the work of Christ from the word of Christ, only to say that Ephesians 2:20 focuses on the people of God, not the Word of God.

⁴²Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 399.

⁴³Most notably, and perhaps influentially John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 16:291.

⁴⁴D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 8:368.

words as referring to Peter as the spokesperson for the entire apostolic troupe. On and through these apostles, Christ will build his church.⁴⁵ Comparably, Ephesians 2:20 indicates that the foundation of the church is the apostles and the prophets.

Matthew 16:13-20 is also instructive for Ephesians 2:20 because it suggests *how* the apostles and prophets function as the church's foundation. Following D.A. Carson's chronological placement of Peter as the *primus inter pares*,⁴⁶ it seems best to understand the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2:20 as those who were chronologically foundational for the church. In other words, their place in redemptive-history signifies their foundational standing and as "first-responders," their lives are paradigmatic for all subsequent generations. Hence, Paul says no less than seven times, "Follow me as I follow Christ."⁴⁷

This temporal understanding of the of the apostles and prophets as "material" witnesses in the temple of God is corroborated by Ephesians 3:5 which suggests chronology as the distinguishing mark. "The mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men *in other generations as it has now* been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." In this way, the apostles' priority is not based on classification but chronology.⁴⁸ This strips away apostolic veneration, as is practiced in Roman Catholicism, and puts all the emphasis back on God's redemptive work and revelation in Jesus Christ. As witnesses of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the apostles and prophets were uniquely qualified to proclaim the

⁴⁵See the consensus of commentators: D.A. Carson, 368; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 251-53; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 469-71; David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 406-07.

⁴⁶Carson writes, "What the NT does show is that Peter is the first to make this formal confession and that his prominence continues in the earliest years of the church (Acts 1-12). But he, along with John, can be sent by other apostles (Acts 8:14); and he is held accountable for his actions by the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:1-18) and rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14). He is, in short, *primus inter pares* ("first among equals"); and on the foundation of such men (Eph 2:20), Jesus built his church" (*Matthew*, 368).

⁴⁷1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; cf. Phil 4:9; 2 Thess 3:9.

⁴⁸Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 217.

gospel and pen the documents that would become the New Testament, but ultimately the temple's growth came from Christ himself, the life-giving cornerstone.

ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. The next phrase, “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,” confirms this interpretation as it suggests that Jesus is the first and most important living stone. The language is intentionally emphatic. Both the inclusion of the reflexive *αὐτοῦ* and predicate genitive emphasize Christ Jesus in his relationship with the temple as a whole.⁴⁹ So, while infinitely greater than his church, Jesus is nonetheless spiritually united to his people as he is a part of the same building. His immediate disciples—the apostles and prophets—serve as the ground floor of his cosmic temple, and he himself is the ultimate prototype from which all subsequent temple stones will find their shape and sustenance. In truth, Jesus is the life-giving stone, the one whose resurrection inaugurated the new creation that Paul referred to in Ephesians 2:10 (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). Accordingly, as the cornerstone,⁵⁰ he sets the direction of the building and serves as the spiritual nerve-center of the building, in which his spirit innervates every square inch. So, as his Spirit proceeds throughout the earth, his person and his cosmic presence increase, so that what Paul says earlier may become increasingly true—“so that he may fill all in all” (1:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15:28).

ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη. In verse 20, Paul moves *up* from the ground floor of God's living temple to the construction of the building. Syntactically, verse

⁴⁹Daniel Wallace describes *akrogoniaiou* as a predicate genitive, one that “is in reality an emphatic kind of simple apposition” (*Beyond the Basics*, 102).

⁵⁰There is discussion about the meaning of the word, *akrogoniaiou*. Is it cornerstone or capstone? The extant literature allows for both, but from the context in Ephesians 2, which speaks of the temple's founding, cornerstone seems to be the better option. Moreover, if Paul is drawing this imagery from Isaiah, the case for cornerstone is enhanced because the context in that OT passage also makes cornerstone the better option. See O'Brien, 217, who quotes R.J. McKelvey, “The juxtaposition of *akrogoniaios* and *themelion* and the duplicated *eis ta themelia* show beyond all doubt that it is the base of the building that is in mind” (*The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], 201).

20 functions as a adjectival clause describing in fuller detail the role of Jesus Christ as the temple's cornerstone and chief builder (cf. Matt. 16:18). "In whom" speaks of "Christ Jesus," who is last mentioned at the very end of verse 19.

In using this phrase, "*en ho*," Paul begins with a pronominal phrase that accords with the repeated use of "*en Xrisotou*" and "*en autou*," which resound through Ephesians 1-2. It locates the growth of God's people in Christ.⁵¹ Paul's point is emphatic: "In Christ" are all spiritual blessings (1:3)—election (1:4), redemption (1:7), God's eternal plan and purpose for the universe (1:9-10), the promise of inheritance (1:11), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). "In Christ" are all the necessary means for bringing salvation to Jew and Gentile alike (2:6, 7, 10, 13), so "in Christ," God through Christ "might create *in himself* one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (2:15). Now in Ephesians 2:20, the holy temple is built upon and located in Jesus Christ.

Paul explains that the "the whole structure" finds its support and supply in Christ.⁵² The adjective *pasa* describes the noun *oikodome*, and suggests that Paul's horizon has moved beyond the proximal setting of a physical temple or a local church. Paul's language is eschatological and cosmic.⁵³ In this way, Paul's temple language exceeds his description of the temple's construction in 1 Corinthians 3; here in Ephesians 2, he speaks not only of leaders in the

⁵¹"The proposition *en* denotes the locale or sphere of the action; thus it is in Christ that the whole structure rests of has its ground" (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 407).

⁵²There is some textual dispute about this rendering. A variant reading with an article, *pasa he oikodome*, finds some manuscript support. It is supposed that the addition of the article was added to help make better sense of the unified structure. As Hoehner points out, "Generally, when [*pas*] is anarthrous it is rendered 'every/each,' and thus [2:21] is translated 'each several building' in the RV and ASV and 'every structure' in the JB and NJB" (*Ephesians*, 408). However, as he and others (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 218; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 156) recognize the more collective reading, "the whole structure," makes better sense of the context, is readily explained by the Hebraic form of the sentence, and finds other examples in the NT, when *pas* is used of an abstract nouns.

⁵³So Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 156-57; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 218-221; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 257-63.

church as in his Corinthian correspondence, but all members, everywhere as members of God's whole house.

Additionally, the passive participle that is used describes the manner in which the temple "grows." Paul selects the unlikely verb *armologeō*, adds the prefix *sun-*,⁵⁴ and conjures up the image of stones being fitted together to shape and upbuild the temple of God.⁵⁵ It answers, "How will God's people grow?" One stone at a time, set in place by Christ as the wise master-builder.

αὕξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ. Further evidence that Paul is speaking of a cosmic-eschatological temple is found in the second half of Ephesians 2:21. Paul begins verse 21, speaking generally of a unified 'structure' that is being built, but it becomes clear the structure in question is in fact the "holy temple" of God, and that this temple is not located on a hill, but in the Lord himself. Thus, this location/sphere⁵⁶ in which the temple grows is not found on a map, but in the very presence of Christ.⁵⁷ This accords with the heavenly placement of believers in Ephesians 2:6, "seated with Christ in heavenly places," and is reaffirmed in 2:22. What is true individually of Christians, is true corporately: All believers positioned in Jesus Christ have access to God's holy hill (2:18). Psalm 15, with its holy invitation to ascend the hill

⁵⁴Paul does something similar in Ephesians 2:5-6, where the three verbs used to describe the believer's union in Christ are each terms, Paul coined by adding *sun-* as a prefix: *sunezoopoisen*, *sunegeiren*, and *sunekathisen*.

⁵⁵Hoehner develops this idea further, *Sunarmologoumene* "speaks of the inner unity or harmony among believers who, before their conversion, were at enmity with one another. The present passive participle describes the manner of their growth. Specifically, as recipients of God's grace, they grow by being carefully fitted together rather than growing apart individually from one another. Notice that it is not self-initiative that causes the growth but the gracious action of God who fits individual believers with each other and with the foundation and cornerstone" (*Ephesians*, 409).

⁵⁶So Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 411.

⁵⁷Hoehner points out that the use of the word *naon* has a slightly different connotation than the other word used for temple, *hieron*. The former speaks only of the innermost dwelling place of God, "the sacred building," while the latter (*hieron*) "refers to the whole sacred area of the Jewish temple, including the three courts: the court of the Gentiles, the court of women (Jewish), and the court of Israel (men)" (*Ephesians*, 410).

of the Lord, is now possible for those who are in Christ. Still, a question remains, “Is this temple historical or future?”

The present tense of the verb *auxei* gives the impression that the growth is current and ongoing. Christ is here and now building up his temple, and he is doing so through the sending of his Spirit to empower Christians to share the gospel. Yet, the preposition *eis* implies that the present construction has a teleological end. The growth is not indefinite or undefined. Like Moses and Solomon before him, Christ has in mind a temple blueprint, and he is bringing to “into” completion God’s temple, comprised of people from every corner of the earth.⁵⁸

Therefore, the historical/future question is not an either-or, but a both-and. “The notion of a growing Church inevitably implies both that history and the future are important.”⁵⁹ The character of this temple reflects the already-not yet tension prevalent in the NT as a whole,⁶⁰ but does so in a way that says that all that is taking place now will eventually be summed up in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:10).⁶¹

⁵⁸For further treatment of the idea of a biblical theology of the temple, see G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*; cf. William Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985; reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, n.d.).

⁵⁹Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 158.

⁶⁰So George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 41-118.

⁶¹P.T. O’Brien’s comments are helpful at this point, insinuating that what is described in Ephesians 2:21-22 is not some kind of ambiguous “universal church,” but rather a heavenly-eschatological community that is already seated with Christ and a part of his temple. O’Brien writes, “Here in Ephesians 2:21 the ‘holy temple in the Lord’ is not ‘the universal church’, as most claim. Rather, this dwelling place of God is a *heavenly* entity. Believers, because of their union with their risen and ascended Lord, are already seated with Christ in the heavenly realm (2:4-6). As ‘fellow citizens with the saints’ (2:19; cf. Phil. 3:20), these Gentile readers are members of the heavenly city. Through Christ’s reconciling work they have access to ‘the Father’ (2:18), who is in heaven. According to the Old Testament prophecy of the temple at Jerusalem was to be the place where all nations at the end time would come to worship and pray to the living God. The temple imagery here is to be understood in fulfillment of these promises.” And thus, the temple spoken of here is related to the concrete realization of the impending eschatological temple, and not simply the abstract idea of a disconnected, universal church. For more on this idea, P.T. O’Brien, “The

ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε. Verse 22 parallels the construction of verse 21, in that both phrases begin with “in whom” (e.g. in Christ), and both verses conclude with locative prepositions—“in the Lord” (v. 21) and “in the Spirit” (v. 22). Likewise, the content of the verses build off one another: Both verses speak of temple-building and what it means for God’s people to live in the presence of God. Fittingly, Paul merges OT temple imagery with the language of bodily growth to present a compelling vision of God’s ultimate goal in salvation—namely, God’s people as new creations dwelling in God’s eschatological, cosmic temple.⁶²

The subjects of verse 22 are different, however, than verse 21. In verse 22, Paul addresses “you also.” Turning from God’s work in the entire universe when he speaks of the “whole structure being joined together;” now, Paul is singling out the Ephesians.⁶³ And it is likely that in light of the preceding description of the Gentiles alienated condition (Eph 2:11-13) along with their new position as ‘fellow citizens with the saints’ (2:19), Paul is highlighting the fact that even the Gentiles are a part of this eschatological temple.⁶⁴ The ‘*humeis*’ is emphatic and strengthens the amazing claim that the Gentiles are fellow-citizens and members of God’s

Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker 1987; reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 88-119.

⁶²Regarding eschatological bent of these mixed metaphors, David Peterson writes, “Every Christian gathering may be regarded as *an earthly expression of the heavenly church*. Even now the members of the Messiah’s community find the reality of God in their midst, in their holy fellowship. But this is only an anticipation of the ultimate reality, the fellowship of the heavenly city or ‘the new Jerusalem’, which will one day come down ‘out of heaven from God’ (Rev. 21:1-4)” (“The New Temple: Christology and Ecclesiology in Ephesians and 1 Peter,” 172).

⁶³The idea here is very similar to Colossians 1:6, where Paul writes of “the gospel” (v. 5), “which has come to you [the Colossians], as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it.” In other words, what Paul is articulating here in Ephesians 2:22 and Colossians 1:6 is that God’s universal work has local application, and that what the gospel is doing elsewhere in the world is also taking place in Colossae and Ephesus. Namely, the gospel of peace (Eph 2:13-16), which is the message of the apostles and prophets (2:20), as it is proclaimed far and near (2:17) will assuredly construct Christ’s holy temple (2:21-22) and bear much fruit (Col. 1:6; cf. John 15:1-8), just as God’s word promises will happen (cf. Isa 55:10-11; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

⁶⁴This would fit with the OT promises which speak of the Gentiles flocking to Jerusalem, cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 433-44.

household. The verb *sunokodomeisthe* is a present passive indicative, which gives the idea that the ‘building together’ is Christ’s doing, and following *auxei* in verse 21, Christ’s work of erecting the church is current and ongoing. Obviously this notion of divine initiative comports with everything that has been said earlier in Ephesians 2.⁶⁵

εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι. Once again, verse 22 parallels verse 21, in structure and content. The ‘*eis*’ preposition is purposive: God is building together the Jews and Gentiles “into” one holy, dwelling place of God. The term ‘*katoiketerion*’ is not often used in the NT. Its only other use is in Revelation 18:2, where John records the words of the mighty angel (18:1), “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons.” In strict contradistinction from its use in Ephesians, the term speaks of Babylon as an abode for “every unclean spirit...every unclean bird...[and] every unclean and detestable beast” (18:2). The language of uncleanness in Revelation echoes instructions from Israel’s holiness codes showing that the Babylon serves as an unholy ‘abode’ for wickedness. Ephesians 2:22, on the other hand, bespeaks of the enduring and permanent home that God is constructing for all those saved by grace, cleansed by the blood of Christ, and brought in from the nations who are under the sway of Babylon (cf. Rev. 18:1ff).

Paul describes the dwelling place as God’s: The genitive in verse 22 is one of possession. Thus to be possessed by God (2:22) accords with having access to God (2:18), and is in itself a fulfillment of YHWH’s covenantal promise in the OT, “I will walk among you and will be your God, and *you shall be my people*” (Lev 26:12, emphasis mine; cf. Exod 19:5-6).

⁶⁵It is worth pointing out that in Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul says that gifts have been given to the church so that the church itself may build itself up. There in the later passage, the edification is spoken of in the middle voice, with idea that God enables God’s people to build up themselves.

Since the God of Israel is the God of all nations (cf. Rom 3:29-30), it is fitting that Jew and Gentile alike be God's special possession.

Finally, the most challenging portion of Ephesians 2:22 is the manner in which *en pneumati* functions in the sentence. Is the prepositional phrase instrumental? That is, does Paul say that the building is accomplished "by the [Holy] Spirit?" Or is it locative, suggesting that, the Spirit is the sphere in which the dwelling place of God exists and is being built up? Though many commentators have proffered some form of the first position (instrumental), it seems better to take *en pneumati* as locative. First, it accords with the parallel *en* prepositional phrase in verse 21, and most of the other references in Ephesians. Second, its placement in the sentence suggests that it is describing "the dwelling place of God," which is immediately prior, instead of "building together" which is earlier in the sentence. Third, in context, it explains how the people of God who are being built together into God's dwelling place are able to actually be a part of God's temple today. The access and dwelling are located in the Spirit, the Spirit that corporately indwells the church of Jesus Christ and which is elsewhere spoken of by Paul as "the temple of God" (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16).

Conclusion

Overall, Ephesians 2:19-22 is an exhilarating passage about the teleological aim of salvation. It highlights the triune work of God in salvation,⁶⁶ and it promises that people from every corner of the world will be saved and unified together in Christ Jesus. Though enemies according to the flesh, Jews and Gentiles have been and will continue to be reconciled and united by the singular work of Christ's atoning death (v. 13-19). At the same time, the firm foundation

⁶⁶On the Trinitarian nature of this passage, Hoehner observes with great reverence, "It is God the Father, the subject of the passage, who is creating the new person into a holy temple. Christ through his work of reconciliation is the cornerstone of this new temple of which the apostles and prophets are the foundation stones...The Holy Spirit is the manner which God dwells in this new structure he is creating" (*Ephesians*, 415).

of God's word continues to stand against all other competitors, those who build on shifting sand will perish (cf. Matt 7:26-27), but those who build on the rock will not be moved (7:24-25). As Paul teaches, the apostolic message of the gospel continues to bring life to the dead and free people from the grasp of false teachers and damning doctrines (v. 20). Finally, in verses 21-22, Paul depicts the already but not yet reality of God's eschatological temple, one that is currently experienced by participation in the Spirit of Christ, and one that is promised to be permanently established when Christ returns (cf. Rev 21-22). In the meantime, this glorious vision serves to spur Christians on toward love and good deeds, toward ridding ourselves of sin and anything which hinders, and to prepare for the coming day when the kingdom of the world will be overtaken by the kingdom of God and his Christ (Rev. 11:15), and day of great joy and one where we will enjoy the access to God the Father which Jesus Christ accomplished on behalf of all those who will believe on him.