

# Tear Down this Wall!

## Greg Albrecht

### TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

**O**n June 12, 1987, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, Germany, President Ronald Reagan, addressing General Secretary Gorbachev of Soviet Russia (who of course was not present), said, “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

The Berlin wall had been constructed in 1961 in the divided city of Berlin by the East German Communists (who were occupied and controlled by the Soviet military) to deny freedom to its citizens who obviously preferred to live in the prosperous and free West Berlin and West Germany.

History teaches us that the building of physical, emotional and spiritual walls has been a consistent human activity. Walls create and solidify division—they send a message of hostility and rejection and often engender anger and violence.

*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time*

*you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to*



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Berlin Wall, Nov. 9, 1989

*you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

– Ephesians 2:11-18

Paul, the author of the book of Ephesians, explains that non-Jewish Christians, the primary audience to whom he was writing, had often been called those who were “uncircumcised” by the Jews. To be “uncircumcised” was a derisive and derogatory term proclaiming racial and religious separation. The use of such a term or a similar one today would be considered at the very least politically incorrect, and more than that: demeaning, hateful and racist.

The word “circumcision” was, of course, a reference to the covenant that God gave Abraham—a circumcision covenant whereby Abraham and the male members of his household circumcised themselves as a physical and everlasting covenant as a sign of their

intimate, spiritual relationship with God.

Circumcision of the male anatomy became a physical sign that Jewish males were God’s people—and it came to be seen as a sign that others who were “uncircumcised” were not as special or unique as the Jews, the people of God of the old covenant.

Paul says those who were Jews and followed the practice of circumcision were *those who call themselves the “circumcision”*—and then he said of circumcision, parenthetically, *which is done in the body by human hands.*

### **A PHYSICAL SIGN OF SEPARATION, A HUMAN ENDEAVOR**

While God directed circumcision under the circumcision covenant (Genesis 17), who performed this ritual of circumcision? As Paul says, circumcision is done *“in the body by human hands.”*

*Circumcision is a religious act, a ritual and*



*ceremony followed to signify separation.*

Adding to this separation accomplished by humans, in verse 14 we read of “the dividing wall of hostility” that existed at the time Paul wrote—a wall between Jews and Gentiles.

## **A WALL OF RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL HOSTILITY**

Walls divide people religiously and racially and they create hostility, and if division and hostility are already present, walls promote and incite further division and hostility.

### **Walls are human endeavors.**

During the time of Jesus, and about 30 years later, when this letter to the Ephesians was written, there was a stone wall of separation in the Herodian temple in Jerusalem. Non-Jews from any race or religion could enter a great courtyard of the Temple area...but, those who were not Jewish were forbidden to enter into the inner courts. Warning signs were placed on the wall of separation.

In 1871 an engraved limestone was discovered in Jerusalem, and the inscription is currently in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey. The inscription reads: *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.*

## **THE TEMPLE WAS THE CENTER & HEADQUARTERS OF JEWISH FAITH & RELIGION**

Most Jews then believed the temple to be the place where God lived, and while Jewish religious professionals may have admitted that God was bigger than any building, they still would have said that the temple hosted God, kind of like a hotel, when he visited the earth.

Who built the temple? *People. Did God command anyone to build the temple?*

*No!*

*Did God ever say that he was exclusively available only in this holy building called the temple, or any religious building, for that matter?*

*No.*

That bold statement that God did not command the building of a temple might astound you—but do your homework. Study your Bible. The book of Exodus tells us that God directed the children of Israel, whom he had just saved from Egypt and all of its physical and spiritual bondage, to build a tabernacle.

The tabernacle was a tent—not a building. The tent was wherever the nation was—it was not on so-called holy ground as a place to which humans must pilgrimage. The nation of Israel was on a pilgrimage to the Promised Land and the tent-tabernacle, a portable place of worship, went with them.

## **HUMANS TO GOD— “WE NEED A TEMPLE AND WE NEED A KING”**

During a time when Samuel, one of the most beloved of all the judges, revered as a prophet, had become old and appointed his sons as judges, the nation of Israel—

specifically leaders they called elders—went to the aged Samuel and said they would not put up with the chicanery and corruption of his sons. They insisted that Samuel install a king—they wanted to be like all the other nations around them.

When Samuel consulted the Lord, the Lord told him if a king is what the nation of Israel wants—then that’s what they will get. But he told Samuel to let them know that choices have consequences, and to warn them a king would not solve all problems. A king would be no walk in the park. Despite the warnings, the nation of Israel wanted a king and Samuel anointed a man named Saul to be their first king.

Whose idea was it to have a king? *The people. Did God command them to have a king? No—the people wanted a king and God consented to their wishes.*

**Many kings of Judah and Israel followed—but the**

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monarchy was not God's idea.

It was approximately 1100 BC when Saul started his reign, and 40 years after that, King David succeeded Saul, and about 40 years after that event Solomon succeeded his father David. Solomon built *the temple that God did not command, but conceded to*, somewhere around 1016 BC.

Before Solomon completed the temple, his father, King David, originally thought it would be a good idea to build God a house. David had already moved the ark of the covenant to his capital city of Jerusalem, but

**In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

**— Ephesians 2:19-22**

David felt it should be housed in a magnificent temple, not a temporary tent.

King David had just finished building a magnificent royal palace, and as is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:1, during a conversation with Nathan the prophet, David said, *Here I am living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.*

David decided to build a holy place—a spiritual edifice. God, through his prophet Nathan, said “no” to David. He said “no” because **God never wanted a temple**. He consented to the temple built by Solomon—he accommodated human wishes.

## **GOD DOESN'T LIVE IN HOUSES BUILT BY HUMAN HANDS**

One day, many years later, God in the person of Jesus, God incarnate, the God-man, walked the land of Israel. In John 4:19-24 we read that Jesus told his disciples that the day would come when they would no longer worship him in Jerusalem—but instead they would worship him just like they had in the days of the tabernacle, when God was with them, wherever they were, rather than in a so-called holy place.

Still later in the New Testament, in the seventh chapter of the book of Acts, just before Stephen was stoned to death by religious professionals who were threatened by the walls-must-come-down message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Stephen said, as we read in Acts 7:48, *The Most High does not live in houses made by men*. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul says the temple of God is what God makes and produces within those who follow Christ.

***We do not presume to build a temple for God—rather, God builds his temple in us.***

## **NOT A PLACE WE GO—THE TEMPLE IS WHAT WE ARE**

God is not all about building walls to separate and divide. God does not need a religious temple or church building—he lives wherever he wants, he is not isolated to places built by men.

***The Most High does not live in houses made by men.***

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household, built on the foundation of his apostles and prophets, with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

—Ephesians 2:19-22

In and through Jesus Christ, God reconciles all who will accept his invitation. God abolishes barriers. God has no need for commandments and regulations that erect a dividing wall of hostility. God has no need of religion and all its buildings, ritualism and icons—they are rendered null and void by the cross of Christ.

In Christ, we are all brought near for he is our peace and our rest. We are, by the grace of God, one in and with Jesus—in sacred and blessed union and communion with him. □

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