

1-1-2006

## The Story Behind Ephesians

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### Recommended Citation

Jolivet, Ira J. Jr. (2006) "The Story Behind Ephesians," *Leaven*: Vol. 14: Iss. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol14/iss2/3>

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# The Story Behind Ephesians

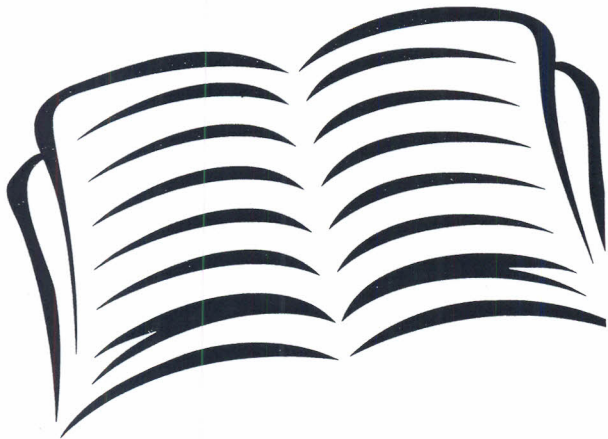
IRA J. JOLIVET, JR.

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For a relatively short letter, Ephesians has more than its share of passages that individual Christians have turned to for spiritual inspiration, and various faith traditions have adopted for doctrinal support throughout the centuries. For example, the central role of faith in the Protestant tradition is summarized in Paul's proclamation in Eph 2.8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." The Restoration traditions, on the other hand, historically have found evangelistic purpose in the apostle's call for unity in 4.1-6, especially in the rousing final declaration that "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." Finally, believers of all traditions have been inspired by Paul's closing encouragements in 6.10-17 that begin with the familiar exhortation to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

While these and other passages in Ephesians have served inspirational and doctrinal purposes throughout the centuries, their true meaning and purpose emerge only when we are able to read the letter as Paul intended it to be heard by his original audience, that is, as a unified persuasive argument or speech. In order to do this we must see that a story underlies and gives coherence to the theological arguments of the first major section of the letter (1.1-3.21) and the seemingly unrelated ethical instructions and exhortations in its second major section (4.1-6.24). Paul's extensive use of liturgical forms, language and images, and his repeated references to the promise and power of the Spirit help us to identify that story as the one told by the priest/prophet Ezekiel in the oracles that he delivered to Israel on behalf of Yahweh during the Babylonian exile.

The story that Ezekiel tells is that of God's relationship with Israel and the nations. The details of this relationship may be understood within the framework of three major themes. The first of these themes is that of God's judgment of Israel and of the nations. In chapters 25-32, this theme is expressed in the oracles against the nations, where God judges Israel's neighbors primarily for boasting against his covenant people in their distress. The theme appears most frequently, however, in passages such as Ezek 5.5-8, which reads:



Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. But she has rebelled against my ordinances and my statutes, becoming more wicked than the nations and the countries all around her,

rejecting my ordinances and not following my statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not followed my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are all around you; therefore thus says the Lord God: I, I myself, am coming against you; I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.

Here we see that God has judged Jerusalem and found her inhabitants guilty of rebelling against his ordinances and statutes, choosing instead to follow the ordinances of the nations. As a result he executes them at the hands of his servant, Babylon, casts them from their ancestral homeland and scatters them among the nations. He removes his glory, which represents his presence, from the temple, from the holy city Jerusalem and from the land of Israel.

Ezekiel's second theme is God's promise of reconciliation, which begins with Israel. Ezek 36.22-27:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

In verses 22-23 God promises to perform some act in order to sanctify his holy name, which Israel had profaned when they were scattered throughout the nations. In verse 24 we see that this act would involve Israel's return to its ancestral homeland. This is one of several indications that God is promising to reconcile himself to Israel by reversing the consequences of his former judgment upon them.

The motivation for the reversal of these consequences is seen in God's pronouncement that he is not going to act for Israel's sake, but for the sake of his holy name, which Israel had profaned among the nations. In terms of the juridical language that

Ezekiel uses in chapter 36 and elsewhere, God is going to pardon rather than acquit Israel. The gracious nature of this pardon is further emphasized by his admonition to Israel in Ezek 36.32: "It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel." The benefits that reconciled Israel will enjoy as a result of this pardon include a new heart and new Spirit that will give Israel the desire and the ability to follow God's statutes and observe his ordinances (36.26-27), resurrection from the dead through the power of the Spirit (37.11-14), a new eternal covenant relationship characterized by peace (37.24-28), and existence with God in the restored city where the center of life is the new, divinely constructed temple (43.1-7).

**The motivation for the reversal of these consequences is seen in God's pronouncement that he is not going to act for Israel's sake, but for the sake of his holy name...**

The third of Ezekiel's three themes, and perhaps most important, is the acquisition of knowledge of God. The importance of this theme emerges in light of Jacob Neusner's observation that "'Israel' refers to those who know God, and 'not-Israel' ('gentiles') refers to idolaters, pure and simple. In Rabbinic Judaism there



are no other categories of the social order formed by all humanity.”<sup>1</sup> From this statement we see that the defining characteristic of God’s people, Israel, was not ethnicity but knowledge. The important question then becomes, what is the exact source of this knowledge? No doubt most of the forms of Judaism that emerged in the periods after the return from the Babylonian exile would have identified the source of the knowledge of God and of his will as the written Torah. But Ezekiel’s story strongly implies that true knowledge of God comes from a totally different source.

We may begin to discover this source when we observe that part of the promise of reconciliation in 36.23, in which God states that, “the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes.” This and the other formulaic statements of recognition that alternatively read “and you (Israel) / and they (the nations) shall know that I am the Lord” are extremely significant because in them Paul later finds both the theological foundation for his doctrine of salvation by faith, and the driving force for his mission to evangelize and teach the nations.

To see how this is so requires that we first understand the important role that the statements of recognition play in Ezekiel. The following insights from Walter Zimmerli are helpful in this endeavor.

In the book of Ezekiel, the organization of the statements of recognition shows that knowledge of Yahweh is not the emergence of an image that has first become clear in the human interior; neither is it a process of speculative combination nor the result of an analysis of one’s own creaturely condition. Knowledge or recognition of Yahweh is rather an event occurring in the face of Yahweh’s acts, acts to which the prophet as proclaimer draws one’s attention. In this phrase, “Yahweh’s act,” we must emphasize not only the subject *Yahweh*, but the word *act* as well. According to all the statements in the book of Ezekiel, recognition never comes about in the face of Yahweh’s inactive being (described in nominal clauses). . .

It is always a matter of Yahweh’s intervention, either in the history of the hostile nations or of the people of God themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Here Zimmerli defines knowledge of God as an *event* which takes place as a result of his actions, and which people have been made aware of through the prophetic proclamation.

Zimmerli goes on to describe how humans access this particular type of knowledge when he writes:

Since the knowledge implied by the statement of recognition always follows one of Yahweh’s acts, the commandment of recognition can never be the first statement. Such a demand is only possible where Yahweh’s actions have become visible, even if only in the form of authoritative proclamation of his coming acts. But wherever the acts do indeed become visible, the imperative component of the statement of recognition will also make an immediate appearance. Wherever Yahweh has acted, there recognition can be demanded. Wherever his actions have brought about signs, lack of recognition is the same as disobedience.<sup>3</sup>

We may draw two important conclusions from Zimmerli’s observations. First, while the statements of recognition are in the form of future indicatives, they function as imperatives in which God commands those who witness his acts to acknowledge him as sovereign lord. Second, the acquisition of the knowledge of God that is required to be his people, Israel, is a *process* that begins with initial assent that he has acted in fulfillment of his promise and submissive obedience to his lordship.

1. Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 91-92.

2. Walter Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, trans. Douglas W. Scott (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 35-36.

3. *Ibid.*, 71.

This initial assent and submissive obedience is only the beginning of the process of the acquisition of the type of knowledge that will ultimately save one from God's judgment and wrath. For when individuals either from the house of Israel or from the nations acknowledge God as lord, they become recipients of two benefits of reconciliation that will enable them to attain even deeper levels of knowledge of God and of his will. The first of these promises is found in Ezek 11.14-21:

Then the word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, your kinsfolk, your own kin, your fellow exiles, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, "They have gone far from the Lord; to us this land is given as a possession." Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone. Therefore say: Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, says the Lord.

Here God addresses the exiles after he has judged the house of Israel and found them guilty of not following his statutes and not keeping his ordinances, through which he reveals his holiness and expresses his divine will (5.7, 19-20).

The same promise also strongly implies that only those who receive the gift of the new heart will have the ability to obey God's statutes and ordinances. The precise function of the new heart begins to emerge in light of God's initial commission of Ezekiel as his spokesperson to Israel in 3.4-7, which reads:

He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart.

Here we see that the heart is the locus of desire or will and that the whole house of Israel suffered from *sklērokardioi* or hardness of the heart, a condition which resulted in a lack of desire to follow God's statutes and to keep his ordinances.

The second benefit that will enable Israel to attain a deeper knowledge of God is in Ezek 36.26-27, in which God makes this promise: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." Here, as a result of a subtle grammatical shift, the new spirit replaces the new heart as the means by which God will empower Israel to follow his statutes and keep his ordinances. This grammatical shift is neither coincidental, nor accidental, nor insignificant. For as the new heart functions as the source of the desire or will to keep God's statutes and ordinances, the new spirit functions as the power to discern exactly which statutes and ordinances to follow.

The necessity of this power of discernment emerges in light of Ezekiel's paradigmatic interpretation of Israel's relationship with God in one of the oracles recorded in chapter 20. 20.8b-13a reads:



Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and showed them my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live. Moreover, I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, so that they might know that I the Lord sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness; they did not observe my statutes but rejected my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned.

In this passage we see that God initially made himself known to the house of Israel through his miraculous act of delivering them from the Egyptians. He then gave them statutes and ordinances, consisting of the knowledge of his will, which would have allowed them to live in his presence as his covenant people. They, however, rejected this knowledge.

As we see in 20.13b-17, the house of Israel continued to reject God's statutes and ordinances throughout their sojourn in the wilderness.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make an end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out. Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, because they rejected my ordinances and did not observe my statutes, and profaned my sabbaths, for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make an end of them in the wilderness.

Here it is clear that the house of Israel had established a pattern of rejecting God's statutes and ordinances.

In 20.18-21a we see that the next generation of Israelites in the wilderness followed the pattern established by their parents.

I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not follow the statutes of your parents, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I the Lord am your God; follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances, and hallow my sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, so that you may know that I the Lord am your God. But the children rebelled against me; they did not follow my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; they profaned my sabbaths.

Here we find that the next generation of Israelites in the wilderness had to decide between two sets of statutes and ordinances: those given to their parents by God, and those actually used by their idol-worshipping parents. According to verse 21a, they chose to follow the latter.

As we see in 20.21b-26, as a consequence of this choice, the next generation suffered a severe and shocking penalty.

Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their ancestors' idols. Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not

live. I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up of their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the Lord.

In verse 25 we see that while God spared the second-generation Israelites from the most extreme penalty of being scattered among the nations, he punished them nonetheless by giving them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live.

We may draw the conclusion that in coming out of the wilderness experience, the house of Israel had to discern between three distinct sets of statutes and ordinances in order to attain life and to avoid death. One of these sets consisted of the statutes and ordinances of their parents through which they acquired knowledge, not of the God who had delivered them from the Egyptians, but rather of the idol deities of the nations. God himself gave Israel the other two sets of statutes and ordinances; the one which, according to 20.11, consisted of the knowledge of his will that would have led to life; the other which, according to 20.25, consisted of a divinely ordained death-producing delusion. Ezekiel's further accounts of the house of Israel's idolatrous behavior after their entry into the promised land, and their eventual judgment at the hands of God for this behavior, make it clear that they lacked the discernment necessary to make the correct decision.

We can now understand the true significance of the promised new heart and new spirit. Without them, the whole house of Israel lacked both the will and the discernment to follow the statutes and to keep the ordinances through which they might attain the knowledge of God that was required to escape his judgment and wrath. As we see in Ezek 37.24-28, however, as the beneficiaries of the promised new heart and new spirit, the new house of Israel will have what the former house of Israel lacked:

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forever.

Verse 24 implicitly states that God will allow his new covenant people to live with him forever in peace, because he has given them the will and the discernment to follow his ordinances and to be careful to observe his statutes.

God's new people will continue to need the power of discernment that comes from his Spirit, even after he brings them into the restored land of Israel that he describes in chapters 40-48 and after he inhabits the restored temple to dwell with his people forever. For in 43.10-12 he gives Ezekiel these instructions:

As for you, mortal, describe the temple to the house of Israel, and let them measure the pattern; and let them be ashamed of their iniquities. When they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the plan of the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, and its whole form—all its ordinances and its entire plan and all its laws; and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe and follow the entire plan and all its ordinances. This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. This is the law of the temple.

Here God instructs Ezekiel to teach the temple's ordinances and plans to the house of Israel. The Greek terms that the RSV translators render here as *ordinances* and *plans* are basically the same terms that they render elsewhere as *statutes* and *ordinances*. The implication here is that the people who will initially come to know God by acknowledging that he is Lord because he has fulfilled his promise of reconciliation, will



come to know him to a greater extent through yet another set of statutes and ordinances, constituting the law of the new temple.

Several centuries after Ezekiel delivered his oracles to the exiles in Babylon, Paul had the revelation that an event had taken place which indicated that God had finally acted to bring about the promised reconciliation. That event was the resurrection of Jesus, which Paul interpreted as the fulfillment of this promise in Ezek 37.11-14:

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

In light of the fulfillment of this promise, Paul saw himself as a priest/prophet like Ezekiel, whom God had commissioned to proclaim his act of reconciliation to the nations so that they would come to know that he is lord and submit to his sovereign lordship and would, along with the remnant of the house of Israel who did likewise, become his new people.

The churches, then, that Paul came to establish in the course of his missionary journeys through Asia Minor and Europe, were made up primarily of those people from the nations who had acknowledged God as lord by assenting to Paul's claim that God had raised Jesus from the grave in accordance with his promise. After completing the initial evangelization process, Paul's continuing priestly/prophetic mission was to facilitate the attainment of further knowledge of God by these former Gentiles by teaching them the statutes and ordinances of the new temple where they, along with the reconciled remnant of the exiles of Israel, would serve God in the restored land forever. When possible, Paul taught these statutes and ordinances to the churches in person. In his absence, however, his teaching took the form of letters such as Ephesians.

The most explicit form of the statutes and ordinances in Ephesians is in the imperative statements such as those in 4.25-32, and in the household codes of 5.21-6.9. However, some of the most important statutes and ordinances are implicit and require the help of insights from Philo's treatise in which he extols the virtues of Abraham. In the introduction to this work he writes:

Since it is necessary to carry out our examination of the law in regular sequence, let us postpone consideration of particular laws, which are, so to speak, copies, and examine first those which are more general and may be called the originals of those copies. These are such men as lived good and blameless lives, whose virtues stand permanently recorded in the most holy scriptures, not merely to sound their praises but for the instruction of the reader and as an inducement to him to aspire to the same; for in these men we have laws endowed with life and reason, and Moses extolled them for two reasons. First he wished to shew that the enacted ordinances are not inconsistent with nature; and secondly that those who wish to live in accordance with the laws as they stand have no difficult task, seeing that the first generations before any at all of the particular statutes was set in writing followed the unwritten law with perfect ease, so that one might properly say that the enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients, preserving to a later generation their actual words and deeds.<sup>4</sup>

Three major insights from this passage will help us to understand Paul's logic in Ephesians. The first insight is that Philo is making a contrast in which the particular written laws, such as the Torah, are inferior to the general unwritten laws. The second insight is that these unwritten laws *are such men who lived good and*

4. Philo, *Abr.*, 1.3-6.



*blameless lives*. The final insight is that Moses recorded the lives of these men primarily as examples to be emulated by his readers.

Philo combines all three of these insights into his concluding remarks about Abraham in which he writes:

So much for all this, but to these praises of the Sage, so many and so great, Moses adds this crowning saying, "that this man did the divine law and the divine commands." He did them, not taught by written words, but unwritten nature gave him the zeal to follow where wholesome and untainted impulse led him. And when they have God's promises before them what should men do but trust in them most firmly? Such was the life of the first, the founder of the nation, one who obeyed the law, some will say, but rather, as our discourse has shown, himself a law and an unwritten statute.<sup>5</sup>

In this passage Philo claims that Abraham embodied God's law. He also claims that the sources of Abraham's knowledge of this law were unwritten nature and internal impulse rather than external written words. From the perspective of Philo's background in Stoic philosophy, Abraham is the example of the wise man who exercised the cardinal virtue of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), the ability to discern between things that are good, bad and indifferent.

Insights from Philo's treatise on Abraham shed light on at least three important aspects of Paul's argumentative logic in Ephesians. First, Paul, like Philo, is making a contrast between the written Torah and God's unwritten statutes and ordinances. This contrast begins to emerge when we first observe Paul's pejorative statements about the law in 2.14-16: "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it." Here Paul refers to the law as a source of division and hostility and as being comprised, literally, of *commandments in dogmas*.

Paul's use of negative language with reference to the written Torah stands in stark contrast to positive statements such as those found in Eph 4.17-24, which reads:

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Here Paul exhorts the Ephesians to continue the transformation from their former ignorant, corrupt, lustful ways of life to their new identities as righteous and holy beings created in the image of God himself. In verses 20 and 21 we see that this transformation involved knowledge contained in teachings about Jesus. And the grammar of verses 22-24 indicates that these teachings were in the form of imperative ethical instructions of some type. In light of Philo's contrast between written and unwritten laws and Paul's earlier negative remarks about the law and his claim that truth is in Jesus, the logic here should be clear: true knowledge of God is not in the commandments in dogmas of the written law, but in the unwritten statutes and ordinances which Jesus embodied.

5. Ibid., 46.275-76.

This same logic emerges even more clearly in Paul's exhortation in 5.1-2 to "be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Grammatically, this exhortation consists of two commands, "be imitators of God" and "live in love," and an illustration of how Christ carried out these commands by sacrificing his life for others. Paul's exhortation here has much in common with Philo's insight that Moses held Abraham up as an example of one who embodied God's unwritten law for the readers of the Torah to emulate. Here, Paul is clearly putting Christ forth as an example not only of how one obeys the commands to be an imitator of God and to live in love, but also as an example of one who obeyed, even to the point of embodying, the unwritten law of self-sacrificial love as well.

Elsewhere Paul makes statements that indicate that as the Ephesians emulate Christ, they undergo a transformation in which they too become the embodiment of God's unwritten law of love. In 3.16-19, for example, he writes:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul is clearly praying that the Ephesians continue to undergo an internal process of transformation in which they are being rooted and grounded in love. From the four specific petitions that Paul makes of God, we are able to identify two key aspects about this process.

The first aspect, found in the three petitions of verses 16, 18 and 19, is that God grant the Ephesians inner strength, comprehension and knowledge of the love of Christ through the power of his Spirit. We recall from our analysis of Ezekiel that God had promised to give his new people a new spirit that would empower them to discern the statutes and ordinances through which they would come to know his nature and his will in the restored temple and land. Paul's references here to the Spirit indicate that God has finally fulfilled this promise. Through the power of the Spirit, God's people will be able to fully comprehend the unwritten statutes and ordinances that Christ embodied. Through this same power they will also attain the virtue of *phronēsis*, through which they will be able to find out what is pleasing to the Lord (5.10) and to understand what the will of the Lord is (5.17), without consulting the commandments in dogmas of the written law.

The second aspect of the process of transformation is found in Paul's request that Christ may dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians through faith. On one level, the reference to hearts functions as an allusion to the promise God's made in Ezekiel, the promise to give his people a new heart. It also serves as an indication that he has also fulfilled this promise. On another level, the reference to faith indicates how the Ephesians themselves actively participate in the transformation they are undergoing. For faith in this context is the act of mentally holding firm to the knowledge that they are attaining from comprehending and following the example of Christ's love. In this way, Christ becomes a very real presence in their hearts as they "grow up in every way into him who is the head" (4.15).

## CONCLUSION

In this analysis, we have seen that reading Ephesians from the perspective of the themes that make up Ezekiel's story sheds new light on Paul's purpose in writing the letter: Paul sought to impart the deeper knowledge of God that comes through his new statutes and ordinances to the people who had come to know him initially through acknowledging his sovereignty by assenting to his act of reconciliation in the resurrection of Jesus. With help from insights from Philo, we saw that Paul taught that this knowledge is found in the unwritten statutes and ordinances, embodied in Christ, rather than in a written law such as the Torah.



Our findings about Paul's purpose in Ephesians are relevant to the teachers and leaders in the churches today who are sincerely striving to help God's people to attain a deeper knowledge of his nature and of his will. Because many of these leaders are sensing that God's people are being prodded by his Spirit to move beyond disputes over such doctrinal issues such as worship styles and the role of women, to reflect on more important issues, for example the ethical dilemmas posed by advances in science and medicine such as embryonic stem-cell research, cloning, and technological reproductive techniques. I believe that God's Spirit is urging his people to look to the unwritten statutes and ordinances that Jesus embodied rather than to the commandments in dogmas that we have deduced from the written New Testament. In so doing, we will come to see that the *summum bonum*, the greatest good, lies in emulating the self-sacrificing love of Christ, rather than in being right on doctrinal matters.

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