

“The Desolation of the Gentiles”
Ephesians 2:11-12
(Preached at Trinity, May 4, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I've stated before, one of the themes of the Book of Ephesians is the union of Jews and Gentiles into one body.
Ephesians 2:14 NAU - "For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall"
 - A. We saw this in **Chapter 1**
Ephesians 1:12-14 NAU - "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ (The Jews) would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also (The Gentiles), after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory."
 - B. We've also seen this in **Chapter 2**
Although the words of **Verses 1-10** have a universal application for every Christian Paul is stressing the unity of the experience of Jews and Gentiles.
 1. In **Verses 1-2** Paul is speaking to the Gentiles
Ephesians 2:1 NAU - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins"
 2. And then in **Verse 3** he speaks of the same experience of the Jews.
Ephesians 2:3 NAU - "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh"
 3. Then from **Verse 4** he speaks to both groups as one.
Ephesians 2:4 NAU - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us"
Ephesians 2:5 NAU - "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),"
 4. **Verse 8** uses plural pronouns
Ephesians 2:8 NAU - "For by grace you (pl) have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;"
2. Now in **Verse 11** Paul's attention turns again to the Gentiles with the intention of stressing again that the Gentiles who were once outside the covenant promises are now united with the single church, the one true Israel.

- A. For the third time in this chapter Paul uses the word “formerly.”
- He used it in **Verse 2** stressing the previous sinful condition of the Gentiles before they were converted.
Ephesians 2:2 NAU - "you formerly walked according to the course of this world"
 - Then in **Verse 3** Paul describes how the Jews were in the same deplorable condition.
Ephesians 2:3 NAU - "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh"
- B. Now Paul turns again to the further desperate condition of the Gentiles. Not only were they dead in sin. They were outside of God’s covenant promises which were given exclusively to Israel.
Paul wrote in **Romans 9:**
Romans 9:3-4 NAU - "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises"
3. The exclusion of the Gentiles was painted vividly by the Jews. The Jews hated the Gentiles. The very dirt of Gentile lands was unclean and would defile a Jew. Jews did not eat with Gentiles nor even eat food prepared by a Gentile. They would not invite a Gentile into their home.
Exodus 23:32-33 NAU - "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. ³³ "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."
4. The Jewish priority is consistently taught in the NT. Jesus came first to the Jews.
- A. The Gospel was offered first to the Jews.
Romans 1:16 NAU - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
- B. Jesus told the Canaanite woman His mission was first to the Jews
Matthew 15:22-24 NAU - "And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- C. But God’s design was always to bring salvation to men of every race
Genesis 28:14 NAU - "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."
John 1:11-13 NAU - "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

5. The Jewish Christians found it difficult to accept their Gentile brothers. They saw themselves as the “true” seed of Abraham. Even Peter fell into this mindset.
Galatians 2:11-13 NAU - "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy."
6. The Jews were proud of their circumcision. It set them apart. By referring to the Gentiles as the “uncircumcision” they were stressing that they had no part in God’s covenant promises.
- A. Circumcision marked God’s covenant people as being distinct, holy
 It symbolized God’s mark upon His people. It was permanent and irreversible
 - B. The problem was circumcision was only an outward mark upon them.
Ephesians 2:11 NAU - "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands--"
 1. Circumcision did not affect the heart. God was more interested in circumcised hearts. God promised that this would take place
Deuteronomy 30:6 NAU - "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."
 2. This wouldn’t find its true fulfillment until the New Covenant.
Jeremiah 31:33 NAU - "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
 3. Paul wrote to the church of Philippi
Philippians 3:2-3 NAU - "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³ for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"
7. The essential element in being one of God’s people is not whether or not you have been circumcised or anything else. It is whether or not you have received God’s transforming grace through the cross of Christ. Paul states it clearly:
Galatians 6:15 NAU - "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."
8. But in the Old Covenant circumcision *was* a sign of the covenant and the lack of circumcision for the Gentiles was evidence of their exclusion. Paul is telling these Ephesian Gentile Christians that before God’s powerful work of raising them up in Christ not only were they dead in sin; not only were they consumed by this world; not only were they enslaved by their own flesh; they were completely cut off from God’s people.
9. Paul describes the extent of the condition of the Gentiles before Christ—utter desolation. Paul is continuing to remind us just how deplorable our condition is without Christ.
Ephesians 2:11 NAU - "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles . . ." Remember, and don’t forget. But rejoice that it was our former condition.

10. In **Verses 11-12** Paul describes the extent of the desolation of the Gentiles
- A. Don't forget the context of **Chapter 2**. In the previous chapter Paul prays that the Ephesian Christians might know the greatness of God's power working in them.
Ephesians 1:18-19 NAU - "*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,* ¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.* "
 - B. Paul is now showing them this power. He is reminding these Gentile Christians just how deplorable their condition was before God worked His mighty power in them.
11. Their condition was *our* condition and the condition of every other person outside of Christ.
- I. They were separate from Christ
- A. This is the greatest of all curses
 1. It is the common condition of all men – both Jews and Gentiles
 2. The whole world is groping in darkness blind to the light of Christ
John 1:4-5 NAU - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
 - B. Multitudes will leave this life in the same condition
 1. It is terrifying to consider forever being separated from Christ
Jesus speaks the most terrifying words in all of the Bible
Matthew 7:23 NAU - "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'
Matthew 25:41 NAU - "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;"
 2. The most beautiful word is the word, "Come."
John 7:37 NAU - "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."
 - C. How is it that Paul is declaring the Gentiles to have been without Christ even before Christ came into the world.
 1. Because all of history is an unfolding of God's redemptive purpose
 2. The raising up of Israel was a part of this purpose. All of God's covenantal dealings with Israel were foreshadows pointing to Christ. Everything in the Old Testament looks forward to Christ.
 3. To be separate from Israel was to be separate from Christ.
- II. They were alienated from Israel
Ephesians 2:12 NAU - "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise"
- A. To be alienated from Israel was to be alienated from God
 1. God had but one people. The Gentiles were not included.
In the Old Covenant the world was divided between Jew and Gentiles. There was no other group.
 2. It was to Israel that God revealed Himself and manifested His special presence. Israel alone was blessed above all nations

Deuteronomy 33:29 NAU - "Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, Who is the shield of your help And the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, And you will tread upon their high places."

3. It was to Israel that God gave His Law
Romans 3:1-2 NAU - "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

4. Israel was God's own special peculiar people. The Gentiles were not included. They were strangers and aliens

B. The Gentiles were strangers to the covenants of promise

1. Israel alone received the covenant from God
God came to Abraham and promised him that the seed of promise would come from him.
2. Paul wrote of Israel in **Romans 9**
Romans 9:4 NAU - "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,"
3. In their lost condition the Ephesian Gentiles were completely cut off from these promises – and so were we

III. They were hopeless and without God

A. Since they were cut off from God's promises they were without hope

1. Hope is a wonderful source of comfort for all men
 - a. A man loses his job but holds out hope for another
 - b. A childless couple hopes for children
 - c. A person smitten with disease hopes for healing
2. One of the worst conditions is to be hopeless
 - a. This has led many to despair. There are over 30,000 suicides each year in the U.S.
 - b. This is the terrible condition of hell – utter hopelessness
If hell were but a billion years in duration there would be hope of release – but there will be no release.

B. To be cut off from God is the ultimate hopelessness

1. This was the condition of the Gentiles
2. There is nothing worse than to be outside of Christ. To be without Christ is to be without God.
3. But by the mighty power of God Gentiles have now been made fellow-heirs with the saints and a part of God's own household.

Conclusion:

1. All of this is by the mighty power of God through Jesus Christ
Ephesians 2:13 NAU - "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."
2. By the astounding power of God we have now been made a part of His household
Ephesians 2:19 NAU - "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,"
3. The household of God today is represented in the Christian church. The man who is not a Christian is outside God's household, apart from God's people, removed from the promises of God. By God's mighty power He has brought us near by the blood of Christ.
4. Are you an alien from the promises of God? There is still hope. Turn to Christ and trust Him.