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The Unity of the Body
2: 11-22

The unity of the Body DIG: As you read these verses, pay attention to the metaphors used by Paul. How do these metaphors describe the actions of Messiah in fulfilling God's purpose for reconciliation? How does a lack of intimacy with God fuel division and prejudice among people? How are divisions an indicator of our need for a Savior? How does the news of this past week demonstrate that we all have a common sinfulness? How does a common sinfulness lead to division, while a common faith in Yeshua Messiah leads to unity?

REFLECT: What are some of the biggest walls you have seen that separate people? What are some of the underlying issues that cause divisions between people and races? As a believer, what actions might you take to begin to break down the walls of prejudice in our world today? How does a shared citizenship in God's family impact how believers view each other? Do you know of someone who needs to know they have a place in God's household? How can you help this believer find his or her place and feel welcomed?

For He Himself is our peace,
who has made the two groups one,
and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

These verses, often misused by Christians against Messianic **Jews**, are actually part of the charter for Messianic Judaism. They are fundamental to understanding both the nature of **the Torah**, which still exists and serves as our blueprint for living, and the relationship between **Jews** and **Gentiles** in **the Church**.



Therefore, remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth (2:11a). Up to this point in the letter, **Rabbi Sha'ul** has been addressing the common experience of all the believers of **Ephesus** through their similar faith in **Messiah**. But now **he** turns **his** attention to **the Gentile** believers of **Ephesus**. The word **Gentiles** is not a negative or pejorative term; it simply reflects the translation from the Hebrew word *goyim* (Greek *ethne*), meaning "nations." While **ADONAI** has made a special covenant with **Isra'el**, **He** has also shown equal love for all the people of **His** creation. Yet, because of the unique covenant relationship with the descendants of **Abraham**, **Isaac**, and **Jacob** (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Dt – I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**), it was clear that **the Gentiles** did not have a direct covenant relationship with **YHVH**. **Paul's** point is that this all changed with the coming of **Yeshua Messiah**, who is the manifestation of **God's** grace to all people, **Jew** and **Gentile** alike.[103]

But this, along with **Romans 11:13**, refutes the idea that once a **Gentile** comes to faith in **Yeshua**, he is no longer a **Gentile** but now "spiritual **Isra'el**," replacing **the Jews** (see the commentary on **Acts Ag – Replacement Theology and Acts**) as **God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6)**. There is no support in the B'rit Chadashah for believing **Gentiles** becoming **Jews**; instead **they** are **grafted into the house of Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Eo – The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el: The Church's Relationship to the B'rit Chadashah**).[104]**And called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" which is done in the body by human hands (2:11).** While the Bible does not speak in negative terms about the **Gentiles** or **nations**, it undoubtedly could become a reference to the pagan background of those not born **Jewish**. Only **the**

Jewish nation followed **the eighth day circumcision** as **a sign** of the Abrahamic Covenant (see the commentary on **Genesis En – For Generations to Come Every Male Who is Eight Days Old Must be Circumcised**). It is easy to understand how the term **uncircumcised** was not only a statement of physical appearance, but also the state of **their** spiritual life. As **circumcision** is the removal of the flesh, so there is a circumcision **of the heart** where one's spirit is pure before **God (Deuteronomy 30:5-7)**. It would be tempting for **the Jews** in covenant relationship with **YHVH** to refer to **the** pagan **Gentiles** in the world as **the uncircumcised** in reference to both **their** physical and spiritual life.[105]Calling **the Gentiles** back to **that time** prior to **their** conversion, **Paul** highlights **their** pre-conversion condition, saying: **Remember that at that time you were without.** The one word that best describes the pre-conversion **Gentiles** is **without**.

First, **they** were **without Messiah (2:12a)**. **The Ephesians** worshiped the goddess Diana and, before the coming of the Good News, knew nothing about **Messiah**. Those who claim that pagan religions are just as acceptable to **God** as the Bible will have a problem here, for **Paul** cites the **Ephesian** pagan culture **without Messiah** as a tragedy. But keep in mind that every unsaved person, **Jew** or **Gentile**, is **without Messiah**, and that means condemnation.[106]

Secondly, **they** were **without citizenship in Isra'el (2:12b). ADONAI** called **the Jews** and built **them** into a great nation. **He** gave **them His Torah** and **His** blessings. It should be noted that there certainly were a group of **Gentiles** who were hearing **the Torah**. There were many **God-fearers** who attended the local synagogues. They were disenchanted with the pagan society and subsequently drawn to the monotheism and ethics of **Judaism**.[107] Nevertheless, **Isra'el** was still **God's** nation, in a way that was not true of any **Gentile** nation.

Thirdly, **they** were **without the covenants of the promise (2:12c).** While the blessing of **the Gentiles** is included in **God's** Covenant with Abraham **(Genesis 12:1-3)**, **YHVH** did not make any **covenants** with **the Gentile nations**. **The Gentiles** were **aliens and strangers . . .** and **the Jews** never let **them** forget it. Many of the Pharisees would traditionally pray daily, "Blessed are **You**, **LORD** our **God**, **King** of the universe, who has not made me a **Gentile**."

Fourthly, **they** were **without hope (2:12d).** Historians tell us that a great cloud of hopelessness covered the ancient world. Philosophies were empty; traditions were disappearing; religions were powerless to help people face either life or death.

People longed to pierce **the inner veil** of the Tabernacle (see the commentary on **Exodus Fq – The Inner Veil of the Sanctuary: That is Christ, His Body**) and get some message of hope from the other side, but there was none **(First Thessalonians 4:13-18)**.

And fifthly, **they** were **without God in the world (2:12e).** The heathen had many, many **gods**, as **Paul** discovered in Athens (see the commentary on **Acts Cb – An Unknown God in Athens**). Someone on that day said that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. **In fact, there are "gods" and "lords" galore,** wrote **Paul (First Corinthians 8:5)**. But the pagan, no matter how religious or moral he might have been, did not know the true **God**. The writer of **Psalm 115** contrasted the true **God** with the idols of the heathen.[108]

Remember that you were at that time separated from Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Isra'el (2:12a ESV). Similarly, before their awareness of the Messianic Redemption in **Yeshua Messiah**, the **Gentiles** of **Ephesus** were estranged from **the Jewish people** and **Judaism** in general. They were not in a proper relationship with the true **God**, nor **His people**. **Sha'ul** will soon describe the change in status for **the Gentiles** who would place their faith in **Yeshua**. However, **they** did not become **Jews**, or even "spiritual **Jews**." **Paul** is careful to make that clear, yet also affirming that **the Gentiles** who became believers in **Yeshua** were then affiliated with **Isra'el** in a special way.

Unfortunately, this truth has not always been embraced by **the** historic **Church**. Starting with the early **Church** fathers (and continuing through many centuries), theologians cut off any connection between Christians and **Jews** (May I recommend *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism,* by Edward H. Flannery, Published by Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 1985). The estrangement has been devastating for both the church and the synagogue. It is a blessing to see in our day a fresh understanding and appreciation by many **Gentiles** as to their connection to **the Jewish** people and **Isra'el** through their faith in **Yeshua Messiah**. This renewed understanding (much of it based on **Paul's** teaching) can only serve to be a source of healing between the church and the synagogue in our day.[109]

However, **Gentiles** should not think of **their** union with **Isra'el** as only a matter of rights and privileges. Rather, it implies an obligation to relate as family to the **Jewish** community to whom **their** faith has joined **them**. When **Ruth** joined **Isra'el**, **she** said: **Your people will be my people and your God my God (Ruth**

1:16). Today, this should mean being involved with **Jewish people**, both Messianic and non-Messianic. **Gentile** Christians who regard Messianic **Jews** as the strangers and themselves as the rightful heirs are not submitting to the message of these verses. Paul does not say that **Isra'el** is estranged from the communal life of **the Gentiles**, but the opposite, implying that **Isra'el** constitutes the norm and the center of religious gravity, not **the Gentiles**. In **Romans, Paul** portrays **the Gentiles** as **wild olive branches grafted into** the **cultivated olive tree** which is **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Romans Cz – The Illustration of Isra'el's Future**), and cautions **Gentile** believers against pride.

And strangers to the covenants of promise (2:12b ESV). These include **the covenant** with **Abraham** (see the commentary on **Genesis Fp – The Abrahamic Covenant**), **the covenant** with **Moshe** (see the commentary on **Exodus Dd – The Mosaic Covenant**), and the B'rit Chadashah with **Yeshua** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bm – A Better Covenant**). The B'rit Chadashah was not given to **Gentiles**, but to **Isra'el** as seen above in the commentary on **Jeremiah**. **Gentiles** are **foreigners and strangers** to it except through faith, which, as **Paul** points out, makes them full participants.[110]

Having no hope and without God in the world (2:12c ESV). This is **Rabbi Sha'ul's** logical conclusion in regard to the past life of **the Gentiles** in **Ephesu**s. The pagan religions and philosophies offered some short-term diversions to life. There were **gods** for almost every facet of their life, but there were always unresolved dilemmas, the greatest of which being to have hope beyond the grave. It is only in the life and work of **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** that there is an assurance of **hope** beyond this life. **The Rabbi** also makes the bold statement that, because of **their** pagan beliefs, **they** were, in fact, without any real **hope in the world**. This message of the Bible remains true today despite the pluralistic influences found in our contemporary culture. The life and ministry of **Yeshua** makes **Him** stand apart from all other religious teachers. There is no other religious teacher who claimed to die as an atonement for sins. Ultimately there is no long-lasting **hope** without **the High Priest Yeshua (John 14:6)**.[111]

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13). Both **Jews** and **Gentiles** have equal access to **God the Father**, through **the shed blood** of **the Messiah**. **The Ephesian Gentile** believers had made a change in both **their** identity and religious status. This verse displays the imagery from the sacrificial system in Jerusalem, in which

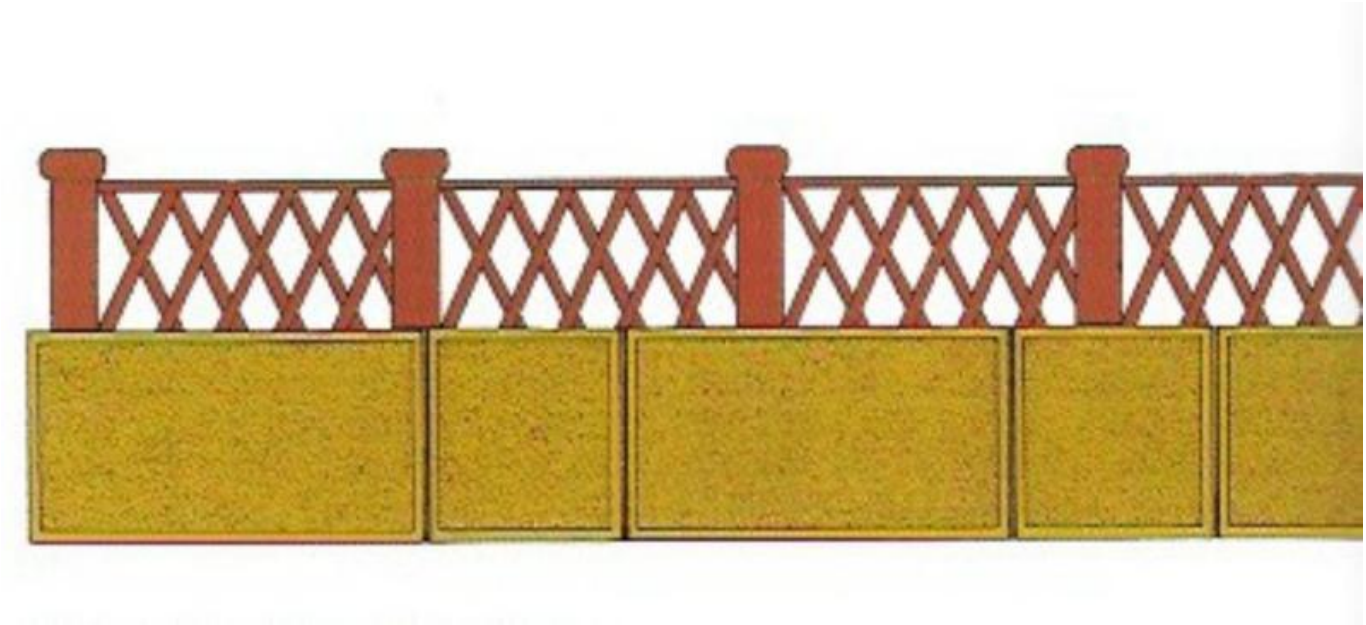
the sacrifices would temporarily **cover** the sins of **Isra'el (Psalm 32:1)**.[112]

For He Himself is our peace (2:14a). The work of **Yeshua** has brought **peace** between us and our **Father** in heaven because **whoever chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy (James 4:4).** One of the sacrifices of **the Torah** is **the Peace Offerings** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ak – The Peace Offerings: At Peace with God**), symbolizing the reality that the person who has peace with **God** has **peace** with those around him. How true it is that **Yeshua** has brought the ultimate **peace** with **God** and provided a new positive attitude with the people in our lives. Although **Paul** is primarily addressing the **Gentile** readers of **his** letter, **he** also includes the **Jewish** believers with the use of the word **"our."** There are surely many cultural differences between many followers of **Yeshua**, but we all stand before **God** in an equal manner. **Yeshua, the Prince of Peace** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ck – He Will Be Called the Prince of Peace**), brings **peace** equally to both **Jews** and **Gentiles** alike in faith.

Who has made the two groups one (2:14b). The **Jewish** believers of **Ephesus** had a vastly different culture and upbringing than the **Gentile** majority of the city. They started on very different paths, but through **Yeshua**, **they** had come to the same conclusion. **Paul** is not confusing identities here. **The Jewish** believers didn't need to become "Gentilized" nor did **the Gentile** believers need to become "Judaized." **They** were both united in **their** faith in **Yeshua**. However, today there are still those who insist that Messianic **Jews** "convert" and become "**Gentile** Christians." This is just backwards because it is the **Gentiles** who have actually become part of **the commonwealth of Isra'el** as seen in **Romans** above. **Jews** don't have to become **Gentiles** when they come to faith any more than **Gentiles** have to become **Jews** when they come to faith. This is why the idea of a "Messianic synagogue" has reappeared in our day as a practical way for **Jewish** believers in **Yeshua** to live a **Jewish** lifestyle. **Rabbi Sha'ul** sees the diversity within **the Body of Messiah** as praiseworthy.

And has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility pictured here **(2:14c). The Rabbi** illustrates the previous point with a cultural phenomenon that was quite obvious in **his** day. The several courtyards of the Temple were divided in order to accommodate different groups of people coming to worship. The Court of the Levites was the inner area exclusively for the priests and their holy service. The next outward court was called the Court of **Isra'el**, accessible by any **Jewish** male. The Court of the Women followed this where **Jewish** women who had come to pray, worship, or offer sacrifices and tithes could only travel that far. The outer court was

the Court of **the Gentiles** which was set aside for any **Gentile** visitors or worshippers like **God-fearers (2:12b)**.[114]



Both **Jews** and **Gentiles** were permitted to enter **the Temple** Compound in order to approach the Golden Sanctuary, the dwelling place of **the Eternal One**. Yet after some dozen meters, they came to a barrier. It consisted of a low wall of 75cm (or 2.46 feet) upon which a wooden lattice of 52.5 cm (1 foot 8.67 inches) was secured for a total of 127.5 cm. **In rabbinical literature this barrier is referred to with the Hebrew word *soreg* (meaning a fence, a grill, or netting). The dividing wall of hostility** was deliberately built low and furnished with lattice allowing a view through so that no one, not even a child, might be prevented from seeing the glorious view of the Golden Sanctuary.

Gentiles could not proceed beyond this **dividing wall** beyond **their** own courtyard. This was confirmed in recent years with an archaeological find near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Amid the pile of ancient stones, one large stone was engraved in Greek with the following words, “No man of another (Gentile) nation shall enter within the fence and enclosure around the Temple. And whoever is caught within will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

With this historical background, one can appreciate the radical statement of **Rabbi Sha’ul** regarding **Gentile** believers. **The dividing wall of hostility** has been **destroyed** by the work of **Yeshua**! Paul’s point is that **Gentiles** are no longer

separated but can now join the **Jewish** people and be one with them as **God's people** through faith **in Messiah**. **The barrier** is down, the **Gentiles** can join in! The critics understand it in the opposite manner. Since **the barrier** is down, then **Jews**, who now believe in their own **Messiah**, no longer have the right to maintain their own **Jewish** identity and must conform to **Gentile** patterns. Amazing! And certainly not what **Sha'ul himself** did **(Acts 13:9)**. Interestingly enough, this is why the Hebrew Roots Movement (see the Commentary on **Galatians Ak – The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**) does not accept any of the books written by **Paul**. Which, of course, violates **Revelation 22:18-19.**

The object of Messianic Judaism is not to destroy fellowship between **Jews** and **Gentiles** in **Messiah's Body**, but to preserve **it**. At the same time, Messianic Judaism seeks to provide a framework in which **Jewish** believers can express their faith in **Yeshua** through, and along with, their **Jewishness**. The Scriptural authority for this is not only in **Paul's** own practice, but also **his** principle of presenting the Good News in a way that minimized the obstacles to its acceptance by its hearers **(Galatians 1:17** and **First Corinthians 9:19-22)**.

On the other hand, frequently those **Gentiles** who raise the argument about **the dividing wall of hostility** are themselves the ones who are building it! For they would have **Jews** enter **the Body** of **the Jewish Messiah** only if **they conform** to **Gentile** customs and ways, and totally give up **their Jewishness** (and in some cases **their** family and livelihood). Members of no other culture are put upon in this unfair way . . . only **Jews**. **Their** idea of **Sha'ul's** remark that **the Messiah** has made us both **one new man**, is that **one new man** is **Gentile**![115]

By destroying the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its statutes and ordinances (2:15a). Unfortunately, this verse is interpreted by many to mean that **the Torah itself** causes **the enmity** or is the problem. It is true that **Jews** who are **Torah** observant would, by necessity, be set apart from **Gentiles**. For example, **a** kosher **Jew** cannot eat a meal at the home of a **Gentile**, **at least in the view of rabbinic interpretation**. While some of this is true, it is not the full understanding of this verse. It actually leads some Christian theologies to assert that **the Torah** is now annulled so **the Gentiles** can fellowship with **Jews**. But this is contrary to the teaching of **Yeshua Himself**, who upheld **the Torah** and claimed that **He** did not come to abolish even one little letter of **the Torah** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dg – The Fulfillment of the Torah**). Consequently, it is more logical to interpret that it is not **the Torah** which is done away with by the work of **Yeshua Messiah**, but **the enmity** between **Jews** and **Gentile**s, which has been

abolished.

Like **the Oral Law** (see **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**), **the dividing wall of hostility** was a man-made idea, one that is not given in the Scriptures. One of the core values of Messianic Judaism is that **the Torah** is the eternal **Word of God** and should be respected as such. The problem is not with the Torah, but how some people misinterpret **it**. When examined closely, it becomes clear that **Sha'ul** never denigrated **the Torah** but was concerned about those who misapplied **it**. As he said elsewhere: **We know the Torah is good, provided one uses it in the way the Torah itself intends (First Timothy 1:8).**[116]

In **1:15b-22**, the ideas of **1:14** and **15a** are restated, with the focus on the unity of **the Body** of **Messiah**. In this entire passage **Paul** is writing to **Gentiles**, and **his** object is to reassure them that **they** are fully **God's people**, that because of **their** faith **in Messiah** and **His** work on the cross, no barrier exists between **them** and **the Jews**. In other words, **Gentiles** are not second-class citizens of the Kingdom. **His** purpose is not to downplay **Jewish** distinctives, but to shine a light on what **God** has done for **the Gentiles**.[117]

The greater **purpose** of reconciliation is spiritual in nature. **His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two** (see **Ai – The One New Man Movement**)**, 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 (2:15b-16). Messiah's** goal was to unite all believers to **ADONAI**, and this would be the basis for unity **in one Body**, **His Church**. The means by which He did this was **through the cross. Yeshua's death** was a once-for-all sacrifice for sin, and dealt a lethal blow to all disharmony. **Paul's** picturesque phrase of **the cross,** putting **hostility to death** highlights the root of divisions. Sin is at the heart of the hostility between people. Once sin has been dealt with, **peace** should be the result. One of the tenets of secularism today is that in order for all people to come together, religious faith must end or at least blend with all other belief systems. The Gospel refutes that assertion. The only unity that will ever be realized will be the one that is grounded **in Messiah** alone.

He came and preached peace to 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 (2:17-18). Sha'ul closes his teaching of the amazing unity of **the Body of Messiah** by giving three metaphors to illustrate **it**. In the picture of **fellow citizens he** shows how **Jew** and **Gentile** have become part of the same Kingdom

(2:19a); in the picture of **God's household he** shows how all believers are one spiritual family **in Messiah**; and in the picture of **a holy Temple in the Lord he** shows that all believers are together in **one dwelling** for **God**.

Consequently, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with God's people (2:19a). Whether they were former **strangers** and outcasts or former **foreigners** and guests, all believers **in Messiah** become **fellow citizens** of **God's** Kingdom with **God's people** – believers from every age who have trusted in **the Savior**. There are no **strangers** or **foreigners** there, no second-class citizens. **Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), Paul** declares, and the only **citizens** of **heaven** are **God's people**.

And also members of His household (2:19b). As if being members of **His** divine family were not enough, **ADONAI's** gracious work **in Messiah** draws us even closer and makes us **members of God's household.** Because **YHVH** cannot give anything but **His** best to **the Son**, **He** cannot give anything but **His** best to those who are **in His Son (Ephesians 2:11** and **3:6; Romans 8:17)**. Heavenly citizenship and family membership are not distinct roles or positions but simply different views of the same reality, because every Kingdom citizen is a family member and every family member is a Kingdom citizen.

Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Messiah Yeshua 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 (2:20-22). The foundation of the apostles and prophets refers to the divine revelation that **they** taught, which in written form is the B'rit Chadashah. **The cornerstone** of **the foundation** is **Messiah Yeshua Himself (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11)**. **Joined together** refers to the careful **joining** of every component of a piece of furniture, wall, or building. Every part fits perfectly together. Nothing is out of place, defective or inappropriate. Because **Messiah's building**, **the Church**, is perfect, spotless, without defect or blemish. And that is how **He** will one day present Her, **His** own **holy Temple**, to **Himself (5:27).** The term **dwelling** carries the idea of a permanent home. Therefore, through the blood, the suffering, the cross, and the death of our **Lord Yeshua Messiah**, **strangers** become family members, **foreigners** become **citizens**, idolaters become **the Temple of God**, the hopeless inherit the promises of **ADONAI**, those without **Messiah** become one **in Messiah**, those far off are brought near, and the godless are reconciled to **the LORD**. This is the reconciliation

of **mankind** to **God** and of **people** to each other.[118]

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **Your** great wisdom and love in breaking down **the barrier** between **Jews** and **Gentiles** so that all who love and follow **Messiah Yeshua** as their **Lord** and **Savior** are welcomed into the family of **God** and built together into a holy dwelling place for you – because we are all united together in **Him**. Praise **You** for such awesome love that **You** desire a family relationship with **Your** children and you delight in a relationship of oneness with them. **You** also delight in spending **Your** eternity loving and living with those who love **You**. **I also heard a loud voice from the throne,** saying: **Behold, the dwelling of God is among men, and He shall tabernacle among them. They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them and be their God (Revelation 21:3).** We love to serve **You** now, even in hard times for we know for sure that someday we will live with **You** forever in heaven! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*