

Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare*

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Abstract

The current consensus in Ephesians scholarship regards the letter's second chapter as an expansion or continuation of the blessing and thanksgiving section from ch. 1, maintaining that it does not contain any cogent theological argument or even a clear and consistent line of thought. This article challenges the consensus by reading the chapter through the lens of the ideology of divine warfare, which is found in texts throughout the ANE and utilized in both the Old Testament and New Testament. It is argued that reading the text through this paradigm brings to light the contours of the author's argument, which is a listing of the triumphs of God in Christ that vindicate the claim that Christ has been exalted as Lord over all things (Eph. 1.20-23).

Introduction

Among the many difficulties in Ephesians is the question of how to read ch. 2. One expects a standard epistolary structure with an introduction, a discernible body with theological argumentation, a section with ethical instruction and a letter closing with several notes of greeting. While Eph. 2 appears at first glance to contain the theological argumentation of the letter body, just how it does so is difficult to capture, since it betrays no polemical edge or theological direction. There is also no clear grammatical transition to the letter body, so that, as John Muddiman points out, one is

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left with a letter that is all head and tail but no body.¹

Most commentators solve this problem by regarding Eph. 2 as a continuation of the blessing and thanksgiving section from ch. 1, so that, instead of laying out a clear line of theological argumentation, the writer aims at elevating his readers' thoughts by pondering the various blessings of salvation in lofty prose.² Muddiman offers a more radical proposal, arguing that Ephesians is the product of the heavy editing of Paul's original Laodicean epistle by one of his disciples, which explains why ch. 2 is so confusing and its form and structure nearly impossible to identify.³

I will argue that Eph. 2 does indeed have a coherent and well-crafted argument. Reading the chapter in light of the narrative pattern of divine warfare found in the ANE, developed in the Old Testament, widespread in the first century and reflected in several other places in the New Testament, illumines the writer's argument.⁴ He claims that God has exalted Christ to

1. J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 97-98.

2. R.R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication* (Studies in Bible and Early Christianity, 43; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), p. 131; A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC, 42; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), p. 91. Cf. also E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 198; M. Kitchen, *Ephesians* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 55.

3. Muddiman, *Ephesians*, pp. 98-99.

4. According to D.E. Aune, the 'mythic narrative pattern of a primordial cosmic struggle between two divine beings and their allies for sovereignty was widespread throughout the ancient world'. He further notes that, while 'the names of the combatants, as well as their roles, change from culture to culture, many of the constituent folklore motifs of the combat myth or legend either remain constant or are subject to a limited range of variation' (*Revelation 6-16* [WBC, 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], p. 667). On this mythic pattern in Greek literature, see J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of the Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). On the development of this mythic pattern and its relationship to such texts as Exod. 15, Isa. 24-27, Zech. 9 and several places in the book of Revelation, see F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 112-44; P.D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. edn, 1979), pp. 292-334; *idem*, 'Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern', *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 37-59; W.R. Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (HSS, 11; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 65-102; A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR, 9; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976);

his right hand and has subjected his enemies to him (1.20-23). This bold claim must be vindicated by a demonstration that the enemies of Christ are indeed subject to him in some way. This is the purpose of ch. 2: the vindication of the exalted Christ—the enumeration of the triumphs of God in Christ demonstrating that the powers ruling the present evil age are indeed subject to the Lord Christ.

The Ideology of Divine Warfare

In ANE mythology, warfare between deities typically followed a certain pattern. Simply put, deities engaged in combat with the eventual victor proclaimed supreme among the gods. After a temple or palace is erected in honor of the triumphant deity, those who are loyal to the victor then celebrate at her or his temple. Thus the pattern: conflict, victory, kingship, house-building, celebration.⁵ This pattern provided an ideological framework for nations throughout the ancient world to explain how their god came to have supremacy over all creation and all other gods.⁶

The Ugaritic Baal Cycles

The two cycles in the Baal kingship mythology tell the story of Baal earning and maintaining his kingship over the two main threats against the maintenance of order in the universe: chaos, represented by the god Yamm, and death, represented by the god Mot. Yamm wins the favor of the supreme god El who appoints him as chief over the pantheon of gods and orders a temple to be built in his honor. Yamm demands that Baal—who is seen as a threat to his rule—be handed over to him (threat). Baal refuses to be handed over and fights Yamm, defeating him (conflict-victory), and establishing his supremacy (kingship). He then demands that El build a temple in his own honor, since it is only right that the victorious god have a

T. Longman III and D.G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995).

5. Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, pp. 83-88. While a number of other elements are common in divine warfare contexts, these basic features are quite consistent across a broad range of occurrences. And while the elements do not always appear in the same order, the underlying logic remains the same. Other features include the development of the threatening situation, salvation, restoration of fertility, procession (in cultic contexts) and victory shout.

6. A. Yarbro Collins, 'Pergamon in Early Christian Literature', in H. Koester (ed.), *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development* (HTS, 46; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 163-84 (176).

house built for him (house-building). After its completion, Baal hosts a celebration for the gods. In the second cycle, the supremacy of Baal is challenged by Mot, who appears to defeat Baal in an initial encounter (threat). After his sister Anath restores him, Baal returns to fight Mot and, with the help of El, is triumphant (conflict-victory), and returns to his throne (kingship).

Enuma Elish

This Babylonian creation epic narrates Marduk's rise to cosmic supremacy. The pantheon of gods in this work contains two groups, the older and the younger. Marduk is born to Ea, among the younger gods, and is endowed with great power, becoming the loftiest among them. The commotion over Marduk disturbs Tiamat, the leader of the older gods, and she is urged by those in her company to wipe out the younger gods (threat). Marduk agrees to meet Tiamat in battle, but only if the pantheon of the younger gods will grant him absolute supremacy upon his victory. They agree and Marduk meets Tiamat in battle, slays her, and from her carcass creates the heavens (conflict-victory). The gods then proclaim Marduk king (kingship), erect for him the temple 'Esagila' (house-building) and hold a celebratory feast there (celebration), proclaiming his fifty names (victory shout).

Biblical Examples

This mythic pattern is implicit in the structure of 'The Song of the Sea' in Exod. 15, which celebrates Yahweh's victory over the Egyptian army. He is described as a 'man of wars' because he cast Pharaoh's chariots into the sea (v. 3) and shattered the enemy by his powerful right hand (v. 6) (conflict-victory). Because of his triumph, it is only fitting that Yahweh is declared the universal sovereign (vv. 1, 18) (kingship). The song then anticipates the building of Yahweh's temple (house-building), where his people will celebrate his supremacy (v. 17) (celebration).

A number of the psalms reflect this same basic mythic ideology, such as Ps. 24, an entrance liturgy celebrating the kingship of Yahweh at his temple (celebration). The psalm claims that all of creation belongs to Yahweh and proclaims him the 'King of glory'. His kingship is based on his mighty deeds, for in the act of creation he triumphed over the forces of chaos and he presently holds them in submission, preserving the stability of his created order (conflict-victory). This mythic structure is especially prominent in the so-called Zion psalms. In the first of these, Ps. 46, the nations are called upon to consider the deeds of Yahweh (v. 9), and to acknowledge

his sovereignty over the nations (v. 11) (kingship). His unique status is based upon his power to provide stability for Zion in the face of cosmic upheaval and to protect the city in which he dwells despite the roaring of the nations (conflict-victory). Because of his mighty deeds, Yahweh dwells as king over all the earth in his temple on Zion (v. 5) (house-building).

This mythological pattern of divine warfare was current and ‘in the air’ in the first century.⁷ For example, it occurs in a number of places in the book of Revelation, most clearly in ch. 12.⁸ John portrays Israel as a woman about to give birth, while the ‘great red dragon’ waits to devour the child (threat). After his birth, the child—Christ—is caught up to heaven, while the woman flees to the wilderness for protection. Verses 7-9 depict the great war in heaven which is won decisively by God, who grants victory to Michael and his angels (conflict-victory). God’s sovereign kingship is then proclaimed from heaven (victory shout), and all those who dwell there join in celebration.

Ephesians 1.20–2.22

This narrative pattern of divine warfare informs the structure and argument of Eph. 1.20–2.22. The author announces in 1.20-23 that Christ has been exalted to the seat of cosmic lordship at the right hand of God and that all powers and authorities in the heavenly realm have been subjected to him. Such a bold claim cannot pass without defense. The assertion that Christ has been installed as Cosmic Lord must be vindicated by a display of his credentials as universal sovereign, his triumphs over all competing powers. Such vindication is found in 2.1-16, which elaborates the triumphs of God in Christ over the powers that rule the present evil age. Verses 17-18 depict the victory shout and celebration of the people of God, and vv. 20-22 detail the construction of Christ’s temple, which stands as a lasting

7. On the utilization of the combat myth on the outer frieze of the Great Altar in Pergamon, which was a free-standing building in the ancient city, constructed during the first half of the second century BCE, see Yarbrow Collins, ‘Pergamon’, pp. 176-84. On the use of the myth in Jn 5, see Mary R. Huie-Jolly, ‘Threats Answered by Enthronement: Death/Resurrection and the Divine Warrior Myth in John 5.17-29, Psalm 2 and Daniel 7’, in C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders (eds.), *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (JSNTSup, 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 191-217. For a discussion of its appearance in other passages in the Gospels, see Longman and Reid, *God is a Warrior*, pp. 91-135.

8. Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, pp. 231-34.

monument to his triumph. The pattern in this passage, then, is as follows: Lordship (1.20-23), conflict-victory (2.1-16), victory shout (2.17), celebration (2.18) and house-building (2.20-22).⁹

Lordship (1.20-23)

The writer claims in 1.20-23 that God has raised Christ from the dead and seated him ‘at his right hand’ (ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ) where he has been appointed as Cosmic Lord over ‘all things’ (πάντα, v. 22). This exaltation has direct reference to all conceivable angelic powers in the heavenlies, as the writer states in v. 21 that Christ is seated ‘far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come’. While the emphatically comprehensive language encompasses both good and evil cosmic powers, it appears that the exaltation of Christ over the evil powers is especially in view. That this is so will be vindicated by the thrust of ch. 2, which is discussed below, but also by the writer’s usage of Ps. 110.

The exaltation formula is based on Ps. 110, an enthronement psalm, and the most common Old Testament text in early Christian proclamation. While most citations of the psalm in the New Testament focus only on v. 1—in the case of Hebrews, v. 4—the development of vv. 20-23 in ch. 2 echoes the movement of the entire psalm, especially the manner in which the conquering activity of God and Christ in Eph. 2 reflects the subjecting activity of Yahweh and his appointed king in Ps. 110.¹⁰ That is, in the psalm, Yahweh appoints the Davidic king to his exalted post as lord over his enemies and then Yahweh himself subjects his enemies to the king. The task of subjecting the enemies then shifts in the latter half of the psalm, as the earthly king goes forth to subdue kings and judge among nations.¹¹

9. The pattern as it appears here is quite similar to that in a number of psalms that begin with the announcement of the kingship or exalted status of Yahweh and then move to defend this claim. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the familiar ׀ constructions in Old Testament poetry, which elaborate on claims of Yahweh’s superiority. E.g., Ps. 24.1, 2: ‘The earth is Yahweh’s...for (׀) he founded it...’ (cf. also Exod. 15.1, 19, 21; Pss. 47.8; 48.5; 98.1, 9).

10. T. Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians* (NovTSup, 85; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 20; cf. also M. Gese, *Das Vermächtnis des Apostels: Die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie im Epheserbrief* (WUNT, 99; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997), pp. 190-93.

11. There is a shift within vv. 5-7 from second to third person, raising the issue of who is being addressed. Some see Yahweh as addressee here, so that he carries out the destruction of the king’s enemies for him (L.C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* [WBC, 21;

The relationship between the activity of God and his exalted Christ is much the same in Eph. 1 and 2 as God first subjects enemies to Christ before Christ goes forth to conquer in the latter half of ch. 2.

The seating of Christ at the right hand of God in heaven has in view his exaltation over the powers enumerated in v. 21, ‘all rule and authority and power and lordship’ (πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος). The major role that these figures play in Ephesians raises the question of their identity. The appropriate background for understanding the powers in Ephesians is the Old Testament and early Jewish belief in the gods of the nations.¹² According to this line of thought, God had delegated authority over the nations to angelic beings, who have rebelled against God and now lead humanity astray into idolatry, among a variety of other sins (Deut. 32.8-9, 17; Dan. 10.13, 20-21; *Jub.* 5.26-27; 15.31). In Ephesians, the powers are portrayed as leading humanity astray from the path of obedience to God. They rule the present evil age, ordering it in such a way that humanity is enticed to continue in transgressions and sins, remaining spiritually dead.¹³ As will be shown in the second half of Eph. 2,

Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983], p. 87; H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms: A Commentary* [ET; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], II, pp. 351-52). It makes better sense, however, for the Davidic king to be in view throughout vv. 5-7. In v. 5a, the prophet addresses himself to the king as he is about to undertake the conquest spoken of in vv. 1-2, and assures him of the assistance of Yahweh (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמָּנוּ, ‘the Lord is at your right hand’). Then, in vv. 5b-7, the prophet turns to a vision of the future as the king carries out the battle. He is still referring to the Davidic king, but now in the third person (M. Gilbert and S. Pisano, ‘Psalm 110 [109], 5-7’, *Bib* 61 [1980], pp. 343-56 [349]).

12. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 63-64; R. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), pp. 160-61; P.T. O’Brien, ‘Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church’, in D.A. Carson (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 110-50 (137).

13. This understanding of the role of the powers stands in contrast to the reconstruction of C.E. Arnold, who argues that the readers of Ephesians were being tempted to live in fear of the powers that had dominated their lives prior to their conversion (cf. C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* [SNTSMS, 63; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], p. 41). On the view argued for here, the powers are those that rule the present evil age, ordering it in such a way that people would be led astray into sin and rebellion against God, so that the conflict with the powers involves living according to the new humanity instead of the old humanity (cf. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, p. 162; T.R. Yoder Neufeld, ‘Put on the Armour of God’: *The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to*

the writer also portrays the Mosaic Law as one of these powers.

Conflict-Victory (2.1-16)

The claim that Jesus Christ has been exalted as cosmic Lord and that the evil powers that presently rule the fallen creation have been subjected to him must be substantiated. That is, the writer must answer the question: If Christ has been so exalted, what are his triumphs, or in what way has he demonstrated his superiority over these supposedly vanquished powers? Two parallel passages (vv. 1-10, 11-16) vindicate this claim.

In the first of these (vv. 1-10), the writer details the triumph of God in Christ over the powers that rule the present evil age, operating under the ultimate direction of the 'prince of the authority of the air'. The former state of the readers is pictured as an existence in death through trespasses and sins (vv. 1-3).¹⁴ It is a desperate situation, from which there is no hope of escape. Such a description matches that of several other divine warrior scenarios, which portray the threatening situation as one of utter desperation, thus highlighting the great power of the rescuer and the dramatic nature of the rescue.

The readers were held captive in death through their engagement in transgressions and sins, conducting their lives under the power of two dominating influences (v. 2).¹⁵ First, they walked 'according to the age of this world' (κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) in that their behavior and attitudes had been determined by and oriented according to the powerful influences of 'a spatio-temporal complex wholly hostile to God'.¹⁶ Second, they were under the control of the 'ruler of the authority of the air' (κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος), a reference to Satan, the ruler of the forces leading humanity in disobedience to God. Under these influences, their lives were characterized by sinfulness in both thought and deed (v. 3).

Ephesians [JSNTSup, 140; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], pp. 104, 108).

14. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, pp. 159-60.

15. Both κατὰ constructions indicate compulsion and control (Best, *Ephesians*, p. 202).

16. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 94. The phrase τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου is understood here as a reference to the present age and not to a personal deity (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 94; contra J. Gnllka, *Der Epheserbrief* [HTKNT, 10.2; Freiburg: Herder, 1971], p. 114; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser: Ein Kommentar* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971], p. 101; A. Lindemann, *Die Aufhebung der Zeit: Geschichtsverständnis und Eschatologie im Epheserbrief* [SNT, 12; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975], pp. 56-59).

Against this dark backdrop, the writer describes in vv. 4-6 the dramatic rescue whereby God triumphed over the powers of evil, setting people free from their grip. In vv. 5-6 three verbs are employed to describe this salvation. They refer back to 1.20-23 and the activity of God in raising Jesus Christ from the dead and seating him in the heavenlies at his right hand.¹⁷ Whereas the readers were formerly dead and held in bondage to evil forces, God has given them life, raised and seated them together with Christ in the heavenlies. In doing all of this, God was motivated only by his mercy and love (vv. 4, 5b). The purpose of this dramatic rescue is given in v. 7. Beyond merely saving people, God intends to demonstrate his great saving power and the riches of his kindness throughout the coming ages.¹⁸

Two statements follow in vv. 8-10 that substantiate and support the design of God to magnify his saving power through his work of salvation and rescue.¹⁹ Both statements are introduced by γάρ and betray a polemical edge. First, in vv. 8-9, the author contends that the initiative for God's gracious and powerful rescue resides in God alone, ruling out any thought of this move of God originating elsewhere. He contends that this salvation is 'not from you, of God it is a gift' (οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον) (v. 8). In v. 9, it is 'not from works, so that no one may boast' (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσθῃται). These statements recall passages in the Old Testament where human boasting is strictly forbidden in light of God's saving acts. God alone has done it, and human boasting diminishes the clarity of the display of God's power (1 Sam. 2.3; Pss. 20.7; 34.2; 75.4; 97.7; Isa. 10.15; 20.5). This notion grows in force when taken together with the thrust of v. 10.

The second γάρ (v. 10) introduces another statement in support of v. 7. Many have rightly noted the 'new creation' imagery present here, with the noun ποίημα and the participle κτισθέντες. But with the noun ποίημα the polemic against human boasting continues, in that the term does not refer directly to the fact of the new creation, but that this work is God's creation

17. Gese, *Das Vermächtnis*, pp. 226-28.

18. The phrase τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις is temporal and not a reference to the evil powers (R. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* [ET; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], p. 97; M. Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* [SPS, 17; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], p. 233. Contra Lindemann, *Die Aufhebung*, pp. 129-30; Schlier, *Epheser*, pp. 112-14; Kitchen, *Ephesians*, p. 61).

19. Both instances of γάρ substantiate the claim made in v. 7.

and not a human product. It is the work of God alone, and this excludes any grounds for boasting.²⁰

With the participle κτισθέντες, the new creation is brought to the fore. Believers were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which have been prepared in advance by God, further highlighting God's power and initiative in saving and rescuing his people. With the final clause of this first section, God's transformative power is highlighted: whereas formerly the readers 'walked' (v. 2) in transgressions and sins, remaining in death, they now 'walk' in good works.

The suggestion that vv. 8-10 contain a polemic directed against human boasting in the face of God's mighty act of salvation is strengthened by the fact that a number of divine warrior narratives in the Old Testament employ similar devices in order to highlight the saving activity of Yahweh.²¹

In the second, and parallel,²² section (vv. 11-19) the author dwells on the triumph of Christ over the Law and the deep division within humanity

20. The language in v. 8, along with its basic thrust, is similar to that in Ps. 100.3 (LXX 99.3). In the call to worship in Ps. 100.3 (99.3), the confession αὐτὸς ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ οὐχ ἡμεῖς ('he has made us and not we ourselves') is similar to οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν ('not from you') and αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα ('for we are his creation') of Eph. 2.10. Both of these appear in a context that calls the people of God to recognize that their status as such depends exclusively on the initiative and creative power of God, ruling out human boasting.

21. A number of Old Testament narratives, in which Yahweh appears as the Divine Warrior, stress the inadequacy of the human protagonist in the conflict in an effort to highlight the saving power of Yahweh. E.g., in 1 Sam. 17, the word 'man' appears constantly in reference to Goliath (vv. 24, 25, who is also referred to as a 'champion', vv. 4, 23), the 'men' of Israel (vv. 12, 19, 24, 26, 28) and the 'man' who is needed to volunteer to meet Goliath in close combat (vv. 26, 27). David, however, is not once called a 'man', but is instead referred to as a 'youth' (v. 33), the 'son of Jesse' (v. 12, 58), 'the youngest' of the brothers (v. 14) and a 'young man' (v. 58). Further, the narrative stresses the nearly ridiculous disparity between the seasoned warrior Goliath with his impressive armor and the ill-equipped, young and inexperienced David. Finally, in order to put the spotlight on the activity of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior, when David runs over to Goliath after the giant had fallen, the narrator breaks in with the reminder that 'there was no sword in David's hand' (v. 50).

22. The passage follows the same 'then-now' pattern as the first, and again is framed by an *inclusio*, with the repetition of similar words and phrases in vv. 12 and 19 (P. Tachau, 'Einst' und 'Jetzt' im Neuen Testament: Beobachtungen zu einem urchristlichen Predigtschema in der neutestamentlichen Briefliteratur und zu seiner Vorgeschichte [FRLANT, 105; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972], pp. 134-43).

that it created.²³ He portrays the threatening situation—the deep alienation between Jews and Gentiles—in dramatic terms so that the triumph of Christ stands out boldly.

The writer's aim in vv. 11-12 is not so much to focus on the privileges of Israel that the Gentile readers formerly lacked, and of which they now partake.²⁴ Nor is his purpose to highlight the alienation between the Gentiles and God—or all of humanity and God.²⁵ The primary focus is on the profound and fundamental division within humanity created by the Mosaic Law—the deep social alienation which formerly existed between Jews and Gentiles—and whatever 'privileges' the writer mentions are brought into view for this purpose.

These privileges are not depicted in the same way as the advantages belonging to Israel in Rom. 9.1-5, a context that emphasizes the glories the people of God enjoy as God's people. Here, the focus is on the division and alienation of the Gentiles from the sphere of God's blessing, and the writer's tone approaches sarcasm, even derogation. In v. 11, the author refers to his Gentile readers as the 'so-called uncircumcision' (οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία), a term used by the 'so-called circumcision' (τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς). Far from being glorified as a mark of election by Israel's God, this circumcision is that done 'in the flesh, by hands' (ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου), phrases deliberately chosen to emphasize the action of man vis-à-vis the action of God.²⁶ The 'outsider' status of the Gentile readers is filled out by the writer: they were 'strangers' (ξένοι) to the covenants of Israel, outside the 'commonwealth' (πολιτείας), and not a part of the community which hoped in the coming of the Messiah (v. 12).

Against the dark backdrop of this desperate situation, the author announces the triumph of Christ over the Law and its divisive effects. By

23. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, p. 152.

24. Contra M. Rese, 'Church and Israel in the DeuteroPauline Letters', *SJT* 43 (1990), pp. 19-32 (26-27); H.W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 353-57.

25. Contra P. Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 190.

26. The term χειροποίητος is used in the LXX to refer to idols (Lev. 26.1; Isa. 2.18), an idol's sanctuary (Isa. 16.12), false gods (Isa. 11.9) and images (Lev. 26.30), indicating that gods other than the true God were made with human hands vis-à-vis the living God. It is also used throughout the New Testament to refer to anything that is the result of human action over against divine action, and that which is of the old, natural order over against the new creation of God (Mk 14.58; Heb. 9.11; Acts 7.48; 2 Cor. 5.1; Col. 2.11) (MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 241; Best, *Ephesians*, p. 51).

his death, Jesus Christ has united into one new humanity the two formerly divided peoples. Whereas the Gentile readers were formerly outsiders in reference to the people of God, they now have been made a vital part of that community.

In vv. 14-16, the author elaborates on how this triumph was accomplished. Christ has made peace by destroying the division between Jews and Gentiles and by creating a new humanity in which those from any and every background may peacefully co-exist. According to v. 14, Christ himself is 'our peace', since he has made the two groups into one new humanity. In v. 15 Christ has made peace (ποιῶν εἰρήνην), having done so by destroying 'the middle wall of partition' (τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, v. 14), a metaphorical reference to the division between Jews and Gentiles.²⁷

He has also 'abolished' the Law, which the writer identifies with 'the enmity' that existed between Jews and Gentiles. Though a number of commentators have sought to soften the reference to the Mosaic Law in v. 15, there is nothing in the text to allow such a limitation.²⁸ Finally, much like Yahweh waging war against the weapons of war in the Zion psalms (e.g., Pss. 46.8-9; 76.3), the writer claims in v. 16 that in his death Christ killed the enmity.

Along with destroying the divisive work of the Law within humanity, the work of Christ includes the creation of a 'new humanity' (καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον), reconciling (v. 16) these two divided elements and making them one (v. 14).²⁹ 'Creation' language is again utilized to describe this work of Christ, where ποιέω occurs in v. 14 and κτίζω in v. 15.

In Divine Warrior contexts, the assertion of a deity's supremacy over all competing powers is followed by a listing of the triumphs of the exalted one. Ephesians 2.1-16 plays this role, vindicating the claim that Christ is exalted over all cosmic powers.

27. Best, *Ephesians*, pp. 256-57; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 371.

28. Gese, *Das Vermächtnis*, pp. 128-29; contra Schlier, *Epheser*, pp. 125-26; M. Barth, *Ephesians* (AB, 34; 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), I, pp. 287-91.

29. Best maintains that the καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον is not a corporate entity, but is rather the ideal type of the new individual believer (Best, *Ephesians*, pp. 262-63; cf. also F. Mußner, *Christus, das All und die Kirche: Studien zur Theologie des Epheserbriefes* [TThSt, 5; Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1955], p. 87). It is quite clear, however, that the καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον is a corporate concept, referring to the joining together of Jewish and Gentile Christians to form one new people of God (Gese, *Das Vermächtnis*, pp. 134-37; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 200).

Victory Shout (2.17)

Verse 17 contains an enigmatic reference to the ‘preaching’ of Christ, noting that, ‘coming, [Christ] preached peace to you, the far off, and peace to the near’ (ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς). Scholars debate the time reference for the preaching ministry of Christ, but Roy Jeal is right to call off the search.³⁰ The proclamation of peace by Christ is best understood within the ideology of divine warfare as a ‘victory shout’, wherein Christ proclaims his triumph and announces the blessing of peace to his people. Similar devices are found in other divine warfare contexts, such as Rev. 12.1-12. After God has defeated the dragon, throwing him to the earth (vv. 8-9), a loud voice in heaven acclaims the sovereign kingship of God: ‘the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have now come because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down’ (v. 10).

Such shouts of acclamation or declarations of the supreme sovereignty of the divine warrior are typically found during the processional of God into his temple (e.g., Pss. 24.7-10; 29.9b; 98.4-9). The participle ἐλθὼν (‘coming’) in Eph. 2.17, then, depicts the ascension of Christ, the victorious divine warrior taking his throne. This proclamation does not take place during the earthly ministry of Jesus or in the apostolic proclamation, but during the enthronement of Christ as cosmic lord at the right hand of God in 1.20-23.

Celebration (2.18)

Peace may be proclaimed to both groups because (ὅτι) through Christ both groups now have access by one spirit to the father (δι’ αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα). While the horizontal dimension—the relationship between Jewish and Gentile

30. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics*, p. 157. The various proposals for the identification of Christ’s preaching ministry are as follows: a reference to the earthly ministry of Jesus (Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation*, p. 191; Muddiman, *Ephesians*, p. 137; Mußner, *Christus*, p. 101); the post-ascension proclamation by Jesus announcing his victory to the hostile powers (Schlier, *Epheser*, pp. 137-39); the preaching of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus (Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, p. 118; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 385; G.B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 60; Gnllka, *Epheserbrief*, p. 146; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 207; K.O. Sandnes, *Paul—One of the Prophets? A Contribution to the Apostle’s Self-Understanding* [WUNT, 2.43; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991], p. 229); the cross and resurrection of Christ as the proclamation of the good news of peace (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 148-49; Gese, *Das Vermächtnis*, pp. 120-23).

Christians—has been in view to this point, the vertical dimension now comes to the fore. It is access to God that is enjoyed by both groups ‘through him’.³¹

In divine warfare compositions, the people who are loyal to the supreme deity celebrate his victory at his temple (e.g., Pss. 24.3-6; 47.5-9; 48.8-14; Rev. 7.13-15). This is the role that v. 18 fills in the present context. Those who have been brought together in one body now enjoy access to the father by one spirit in a scene depicting the two groups that had previously been divided now united in worship. The imagery suggested by the term προσαγωγῆν is that of the Old Testament cult. It is used in the LXX of bringing the required offerings for approach to God (e.g., LXX Lev. 1.3; 3.3; 4.14), and the temple imagery of the present context (vv. 19-22) further indicates that the worship of God by the new humanity is in view.³²

This section closes by again noting the reversal of the situation that formerly plagued the readers (v. 19). The ‘once-now’ schema is brought to completion: whereas ‘at that time’ (τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ, v. 12a) they were outside the πολιτείας of Israel and ξένοι to the covenants, they are ‘no

31. The force of the dative expression ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι is highly disputed. Most scholars regard it as a dative of sphere so that ‘in one spirit’ is the ‘place’ of access to God for both groups (G.D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], p. 683; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, pp. 149-50; Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics*, p. 162; G.W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5.21-33* [Biblical Interpretation Series, 30; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998], p. 174; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 389; Barth, *Ephesians*, I, pp. 267-68; Mußner, *Christus*, p. 104). This is seen as best explaining the use of the modifier ‘one’ in the clause, and makes good sense as standing in direct contrast with ‘in the flesh’ of v. 11. It is inappropriate, however, to view ‘in one spirit’ as parallel to ‘in the flesh’ from v. 11. The point is not that Gentiles who were formerly so ‘in the flesh’ are now something different ‘in one spirit’. ‘In the flesh’ in v. 11 does not describe the sphere in which Gentiles formerly were ‘being’, and ‘in one spirit’ involves both groups, not just the Gentile readers. Further, it appears that the notion of sphere is covered by other expressions in the immediate context, and the writer seems to go to great lengths to stress that the sphere in which Jewish and Gentile believers are now united is ‘in Christ’. It is preferable to read this dative expression as instrumental, so that the Spirit is seen as the one who makes effective the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the body of Christ (cf. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, p. 119; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 209).

32. Gese, *Das Vermächtnis*, p. 198; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 149; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 209.

longer' (οὐκέτι, v. 19a) ξένοι, but are now συμπολίται ('fellow citizens'), along with 'the saints' (τῶν ἁγίων).³³

Another device that highlights the reversal of the situation and serves as a transition to the following section is the elaborate paronomasia based on the word οἶκος. In vv. 19-22, words with the οἶκ- root are used six times, two of which appear in v. 19. The letter's Gentile readers are no longer πάροικοι ('strangers'), but are rather οἰκέοι ('household members').

House-building (2.20-22)

Having listed the triumphs that establish and vindicate the exaltation of Christ over the powers ruling the present evil age, in vv. 20-22 the writer explains that this new creation that God has inaugurated, this new humanity, is also the place where God now dwells by his Spirit.³⁴ The church is God's new temple, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the foundation stone. As such it stands as a lasting monument to the exalted lordship of Christ.

The existence of the temple in Jerusalem reminded Israel that their God was superior to all others and was indeed sovereign ruler of the universe. Similarly, in the ANE texts mentioned above, deities who triumphed in combat with other deities earned the right to have a temple built in their honor.³⁵ In the same way the construction by God of this new temple made up of the one new humanity points to the triumph of Christ and the subjection of the powers to him.

The section stretching from 2.19b to 2.22 is filled with 'household' terms and temple imagery. In v. 19b, both Jewish and Gentile Christians

33. The term τῶν ἁγίων is a reference to all believers (Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics*, p. 159; MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, p. 248). The burden of this section is to demonstrate that Christ has dramatically overcome the negative effects of the Law upon humanity by uniting Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, so that a reference to all believers, even those glorified in heaven, makes best sense in the present context. The letter's Gentile readers have been made a unified part of the cosmic fellowship of the followers of Jesus.

34. The dative expression ἐν πνεύματι most likely indicates the means by which God's people are his dwelling place, his new temple (Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 688; cf. also T.G. Gombis, 'Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5.18 in its Epistolary Setting', *TynBul* 53 [2002], pp. 259-72. Contra M. Bouttier, *L'épître de Saint Paul aux Ephésiens* [CNT, 9B; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991], p. 131).

35. A.S. Kapelrud, 'Temple Building, A Task for Gods and Kings', *Or* 32 (1963), pp. 56-62.

are now citizens ‘with the saints and members of the house of God’ (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ). This depicts the church as a heavenly communion that is ‘being built’ (ἐποικοδομηθέντες) upon a foundation consisting of the apostles and prophets (v. 20).³⁶ In v. 21, the whole ‘building’ (οἰκοδομή) is now growing into a ‘holy temple’ (ναὸν ἁγίου) in the Lord, in whom they are also ‘being built up (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into a dwelling (κατοικητήριον) of God by the Spirit’ (v. 22).

Just as triumphant deities in the ANE had temples or palaces built in their honor, so here in Eph. 2 the triumphs of the exalted cosmic Lord Christ are memorialized with the building of his temple, the people of God made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Conclusion

Ephesians 2 is not a sort of rambling expansion to the thanksgiving and blessing section of ch. 1. Nor is it the incoherent result of a clumsy editing process. When read against the background of the structure of ANE divine warfare mythology, it emerges that there is indeed a clear progression of thought and a tightly woven argument in 1.20–2.22, wherein the writer announces the exaltation of Christ to cosmic lordship and then delineates his triumphs over the powers that rule the present fallen age. Chapter 2 then follows the logic of divine warfare ideology: the triumphs of Christ over the evil powers vindicate the exalted status of the Lord Christ, who announces his victory by proclaiming peace. His people gather to him in unified worship as his temple, which he has founded and is building as a lasting monument to his universal sovereign lordship.

36. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, p. 61; Schlier, *Epheser*, p. 142.