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The old prophet at Bethel is not a character to admire. He was not a man of courage to stand against the evil. Unwilling or unable to be present at the Bethel ceremony himself, he allowed his sons to go, rendering any effective testimony on his part impossible. He was guilty of a very common sin: he told a lie with intent to deceive, and drag the man of God down to his own level.

We are not all called upon to stand before kings. We may not have any great mission in public. But, 'putting away lying,' we can 'speak every man truth with his neighbour' (Eph. 4:25). In public and in private we are constant targets for the enemy. None of us is too lowly or obscure to escape his notice. To eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to eat and drink in Bethel, may seem trivial and insignificant matters in themselves, especially to those who know not God. But it was the word of God that was being assailed as it is today. Let us be loyal to Him, cost what it may, and refuse to be turned aside from that which we know to be God's word to us.

## 'THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION'

J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D.

'Ye were in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel . . . having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . *For HE is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us . . . that He might reconcile us to God*' (Ephesians 2:11-16). That is, the intervening wall which formed the barrier between Jew and Gentile—metaphorically. To understand the metaphor we must know something of the construction of the Temple in St Paul's day, wherein the Jews worshipped. The temple area which had been enclosed by Herod the Great was very large. It consisted of court within court, and innermost of all the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. There were varying degrees of sanctity in these sacred

places. In the Holy of Holies only the High Priest could enter, and that once in the year. The Holy Place was entered daily and incense was burned by a priest on the golden altar at the moment of the sacrifice of the morning and evening lamb. This sacrifice took place outside the Court of the Priests, where was the great Altar of Burnt-offerings. Outside this again were two further courts—the Court of the Sons of Israel immediately adjacent, and beyond this on the east the Court of the Women. The whole of the localities thus far mentioned formed a raised plateau: from it you descended at various points down five steps and through gates in a lofty wall, to find yourself not yet outside the Temple-precincts, but on a narrow platform overlooking another large court—the outer court to which Gentiles who desired to see something of the glories of the Temple, or to offer gifts and sacrifices to the God of the Jews, were freely admitted. Further in than this court they were forbidden on pain of *death* to go. The actual boundary line which the Gentiles might not cross was not the high wall with its gates, but a low stone barrier about five feet in height which ran round at the bottom of fourteen more steps.<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1871, during the excavations which were being made on behalf of the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, M. Clermont Ganneau found one of the very pillars which Josephus describes as having been set up on the barrier to which Paul here refers. It is now preserved in the Museum at Constantinople, and it bears the following inscription:

NO MAN OF ANOTHER NATION TO ENTER  
WITHIN THE FENCE AND ENCLOSURE  
ROUND THE TEMPLE. AND WHOEVER IS  
CAUGHT WILL HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME  
THAT HIS DEATH ENSUES.

<sup>1</sup> This account is derived from Josephus *Antiqq.* xv ii, *B. J.* v. 5. In the latter passage he says: 'As you went on through this first court to the second there was a stone fence running all round, three cubits high and most beautifully worked; on it there were set up at equal distances pillars setting forth the Law of Sanctity, some in Greek and some in Roman characters, how that no man of another race might pass within the sanctuary.'

That barrier, with its series of inscribed stones threatening death to the intruder, was still standing in the Temple courts at the moment when Paul boldly proclaimed that Christ had broken it down. It still stood; but it was already antiquated, obsolete, out of date, so far as its spiritual meaning went. The sign still stood: but the thing signified was broken down. The sign signified was the separation between Gentile and Jew. That was done away in the person of Jesus Christ. A few years later the sign itself was dashed down in a literal ruin. Out of that ruin a fragment of it has been dug, after exactly eighteen hundred years, to enforce Paul's words, and by a striking object lesson to bid us, the Gentiles, 'remember' that in CHRIST JESUS we who *were* 'far off' have been *made nigh*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This excerpt is taken from the small, but excellent commentary by the learned Author, on the Ephesian Epistle, published nearly fifty years ago, and now unprocurable; though a copy may perhaps be hidden away in some Theological Library; if so, let the student delve into it! In Eastern lands where varieties of religion, or caste systems, etc., prevail and often divide communities into different categories some even being scheduled as 'untouchables', or even 'out-castes', etc., the message of the Christian Gospel comes as a wonderful 'regenerator' and spiritual 'uplifter', in the highest and noblest sense of these terms. The appeal of the great apostle is still a vital force in renewing the spirit of mankind: 'Be not fashioned according to *this* world: but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect WILL OF GOD.' (Rom. 12: 1, 2.) The appeal is to *Christians* as well as to all others.