

regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...

"Two groups one" – believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

"Destroyed the barrier" – a barrier of prejudice. Jews and Gentiles practised strict religious isolation from one another. Gentiles in the Jerusalem temple area were not allowed past the barrier in the Court of the Gentiles.

16 ...and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross, by which He put to death their hostility.

"One body" – God sees those who are the Lord's, those who are His, as one body of Christ.

17-18 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.

"Far away and... near" – Gentiles, unlike Jews, had no cultural experience of the Living God and so were not as "near", although both had shared the same need to come into personal relationship through Jesus and His Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow

citizens with God's people and also members of His household...

"Foreigners and strangers" – addressing what had been a deep-seated division.

20 ...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

"Cornerstone" – hundreds of years before Christ, Isaiah spoke of God laying a "tested stone" as a cornerstone foundation, Isaiah 28:16, meaning the Messiah to come.

"Foundation of apostles and prophets" – the early church was built on these ministries as people were sent out in ground-breaking roles. Church planting in our time, both overseas and new congregations at home, require the equipping ministries mentioned later in the letter, Eph. 4:11-13.

21 In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

22 And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

"In Him... built together" – Peter refers to Jesus as the Living Stone in whom we 'living stones' are being built into a spiritual 'house', 1 Pet. 2:4-6

IN PRACTICE The third teaching in this theme of God's promise of our inclusion in His hope and His promise of rest, is about who is included and whether there is a kind of hierarchy. We think there is. We think that our religious obedience, however it's expressed, gets us up the queue line because that's how we are programmed – so much in our education, professional life and general experience is based on merit.

When ministers began to take the Good News of Jesus beyond pews and pulpit (as John Wesley did in the 1700s and many others since) God's love and grace for the apparently underserving startled the religious mind. He loves to overturn our comfortable theology! Back in the first century, the Jews really did consider themselves God's chosen people, even if they had largely rejected their own Messiah. God confronted that exclusivity of attitude in them, and He does in us. Formal religion then and now, raises barriers to knowing God's love. He delights in opening the gate of Jesus which needs no ticket other than a desire to enter in and experience Him.

QUESTION *If you see another person in church who dresses differently and behaves differently, how does God view them and how will you love them anyway?*

PRAYER Father God, I thank you for Your enduring promises for me and others around me. Help me to hear You speaking them to me and to receive them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, July 22, 2018 with commentary notes

Church calendar readings for **Sunday, July 22**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – or read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Three promises of God concerning inclusion and rest

2 Samuel 7:1-14a – Rest from oppression with God present

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 – Jesus' compassion for all who draw close

Ephesians 2:11-22 – Access to the Father without exclusion

2 Samuel 7:1-14a » The promise of God's presence bringing rest

David is promised longevity of rule and a long lineage or 'house'

1-2 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

David, as king, now had a palace of stone and imported cedar while the ark remained under a tent, 2 Sam. 6:17. David felt that the heavenly King should be more prominently honoured than him.

3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."

4 But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying...

This word is also referred to as the Davidic covenant. It contains both national (v.10) and personal (v.11) promises.

For further study of references to this as a covenant, see 2 Sam. 23:5, Psalm 89:3,28,34,39 and Ps. 132:11

5-7 "...Go and tell My servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build Me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the

Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as My dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?"'

"Are you the one?" – David's God-given task was to fight the Lord's battles to achieve freedom from oppression, or rest, in the land that had been promised. See 1 Kings 5:3, 1 Chron. 22:8-9.

8 "Now then, tell My servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over My people Israel.

9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth.

"Cut off all your enemies" – Bible material is often arranged by topic rather than timing. The events of 2 Sam. 8:1-14 had already happened.

10-11 And I will provide a place for My people Israel and will plant them

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so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"Provide a place... for Israel" – the real purpose behind making David king.

"Since...I appointed leaders..." – the time of the judges who preceded Saul, David and the kings.

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord Himself will establish a house for you:

"Establish a house" – God does not want David to build Him a house, or temple, but God will build David a house, or royal dynasty.

Many Bible covenants are conditional with an "if" clause. This covenant with David, as with Noah, Abram and Phinehas, is unconditional.

12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.

13-14 He is the one who will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be His father, and He will be My son.

The covenant points to its greater fulfilment in Jesus Christ, born of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, Matt. 1:1, Luke 1:32-33 etc

IN PRACTICE This teaching in the Old Testament from King David's time contains the first of three promises from God of 'rest', meaning peace and trust from enemies.

David's enemies mostly appeared with a spear in their hands, and his battles are trials of military strength worked out in combat on the battlefield. In our world of NATO and Europol and summit talks, is that now irrelevant? Certainly not. Spiritual conflicts in the heavenlies, where the hosts of the defeated enemy, Satan, are still pursuing a vicious rearguard action, are played out in acts of terrorism, persecution and imprisonment of political opponents, and every kind of cruelty and injustice.

When we encounter harsh actions and toxic people, we need to discern the evil that is working through people's vulnerabilities and insecurities. Then turning to God in worship, and His promise of rest, starts to make present-day, practical sense.

QUESTION *When evil in one of its forms draws near to us, who do we draw near to? How do we bring God's promises to bear?*

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 » Jesus' compassion promised for all who draw close

Wherever Jesus went crowds gathered, brought their sick - and were healed

30-31 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He said to them, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

"Get some rest" – another definition of rest is finding a quiet place with Jesus.

32-34 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

Or crossed the shoreline. Gennesaret (modern day Ginosar) is down the coast a little way from Capernaum, towards Tiberius.

54-56 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised Jesus.

The crowd from vv.32-34 could see the boat and follow its progress on foot.

They ran throughout that whole region

and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. And wherever He went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

"All who touched it..." – a clear statement. See also Matt. 8:16-17

IN PRACTICE To seek a divine encounter with the promise of healing is entirely in line with this teaching, but out of line with most of our experience. It's controversial. We all know people who have struggled with illness. For some their earthly life appears to have foreclosed early and suddenly.

The account of people flocking to Jesus, pressing in to Him and the statement that "all who touched [His cloak] were healed" leaves us with both a promise and also a problem.

The promise seems clear enough, but so is the expectation of coming to the Lord (who we can't touch) and trusting in Him, when we have so many alternatives to trust in. Some we know from their stories are miraculously healed; for many it is a process and good medicine may be experienced as God's gift. For some the healing is total in transition to new and eternal life. Our philosophy is inadequate to explain this, but let's not let lack of predictability and our desire for control and reason stop us from simply trusting and believing what God has written.

QUESTION *In the battle that goes on in our minds between reason and logic and trusting in what God says, how do we referee the contest?*

Ephesians 2:11-22 » The promise of access to the Father without exclusion

The new relationship with God includes Gentiles on the same basis as Jews

11-13 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

"Remember that formerly... at that time" – referring to those outside a personal relationship

with Christ, as they were when they "followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air...", Eph. 2:1-10. *We are either committed to belong to Christ, or we are by default under the sway of the devil.*

"You who are Gentiles" – most of those in the church in Ephesus.

The rite of circumcision was a clear mark of distinction and also pride. A major exclusion in the ancient world, between people groups hostile to each other, is reconciled in Christ.

14-15 For He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and