

## THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID

There's a line in an old hymn that says, "What He takes or what He gives us, shows the Father's love so precious." Now it is easy for us to sin, "What He gives us shows the Father's love." But it is hard for us to sing the other side, "What He takes from us shows the Father's love." Think of the times you felt that something was the plan of God for your life, only to have it stopped and have the Father reveal to you, "That's not My plan. That may be a noble purpose, but it's not My plan for you."

When God had given to King David the kingdom of Israel, he wanted to honor God and show his love for Him by building Him a house. He was so anxious about it that he said, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Psalm 132:4, 5.

Did David mean that he would not go to his house, nor go to sleep, until he had built the temple for the Lord? Was he so foolish as to suppose that he could build the temple in one day? Surely not. It took him a long time to collect money and materials for Solomon to work with, and then, with thousands of men employed, seven years were required for the task. David was not so wild to suppose that he could build the temple for God before nightfall. What then did he mean?

David, in Psalm 132, did not say anything about *building* a temple for the Lord. He vowed that he would not go to sleep until he had *found out a place* for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. The same vow can be made and performed by anybody, and ought to be made and kept by every one. He meant that he would not sleep until he had God dwelling in him; for he was consecrating to the Lord's use the temple which God Himself had built without hands; for "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

Solomon, who built the first and most glorious Jewish temple, knew that it was not capable of accommodating the Lord. In his prayer at the dedication of the temple, he said: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built?" 2 Chronicles 5:18.

No; a house built by man, however grand it may be, cannot be the Lord's real dwelling-place; but the man himself, not made with hands, can be The High and Lofty One, whose name is holy, "inhabiteh

eternity,” and dwells at the same time “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Isaiah 57:15.

The great work of building His own house can be done only by the Creator Himself, but He lets us be co-workers with Him in this. I think you will see already what is your part of the work, for we have found that our bodies, which are His temple, are made up of the food that we eat.

So the work that God gives to you is like that which David had, to select the materials out of which His house is to be built. God provides the very best, and He tells us just what is good, and what is harmful, and then He allows us to choose just what material we will for His house to be made up of.

If we love and honor Him as David did, shall we not be very careful only to furnish the very best material for His house, and not to take into our bodies anything that is not good, just to satisfy our own appetite, or please our taste? Shall we not find out from God’s Word just what is the food that He has provided for us, and take that which will make good, pure, blood, strong muscles, and clear brains, so that our bodies may be in the best possible condition for His service?

Then the prophet of God came to David with this message from the Lord: “I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.” 2 Samuel 7:12, 13.

David was a man after God’s own heart because he believed God’s everlasting covenant. God promised David that his seed would build an house and that his kingdom would be established forever. David rested his faith in the word of God. Because he believed God’s promise his faith proved genuine.

The Lord proceeded to tell David, “I will be his Father and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, . . . Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever.” 2 Samuel 7:14-16. The words, “If he commit iniquity,” show plainly that God was not at that time speaking of Christ personally, but of Solomon; yet the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, uses the promise to Solomon as though it had been spoken directly of Christ, and of no one else.

What does this show us? Just this, that it was only in Christ that God was Solomon’s Father, and Solomon God’s son, and that, in Christ,

the promise, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son," applies to people who have committed iniquity, just as much as to Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God." John 1:12.

What a wonderful truth! So wonderful that we should not have believed it, if the mouth of the Lord had not spoken it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" 1 John 3:1. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." Romans 8:16, 17. But Christ, as Son of God, is "heir of all things;" therefore we, as joint-heirs with Him, are also heirs of all things. Here we find, from God's own mouth, that every position and honor that Christ has, we have in equal measure with Him.

The house of David was the most ethnically diverse kingdom. His grandmother Ruth was a Moabitess. His secret service was composed of such trusted men as Uriah the Hittite and Zelek the Ammonite. His trusted counselor was Ahithophel the Gilonite. Just look at the ethnically diverse list of mighty men in 2 Samuel 23.

Now when the throne of David fell after the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the temple the prophets looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promise to David of the restoration of his kingdom. Amos forecast the raising up of the fallen house of David. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this." Amos 9:11, 12. Some take this to mean the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army, but it has nothing to do with the rebuilding of the temple either following the exile or a future construction in the Jerusalem of today.

This is so for several reasons: (1) Because the rebuilding of the ancient temple, in and of itself, could not fulfill what the prophecy says concerning the call of the Gentiles; (2) Because the building of that temple did not restore the throne of David; (3) Because the Apostle James locates the realization of what Amos predicted concerning the conversion of the Gentiles at a point of time subsequent to the crucifixion.

The Apostle James, recalling how "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name," said that this was in fulfillment of the words of the prophets, as it is written: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord." Acts 15:14-17. So we see that the house of Israel is restored and built up by the conversion of the Gentiles.

In no just sense of the expression can it be said that the house, or throne, of David was rebuilt previous to the appearance of the Messiah. However, from the point of time at which Christ was born of Mary, a direct descendant from the mighty monarch, King David. Jesus of Nazareth was of the house and lineage of the latter prince. Before Pilate, he confessed that he was a king. John 18:37. In him the house of David once more vaulted to the throne of prospective power. That power will never again be diminished or destroyed. Christ died with the superscription "King of the Jews." When he rose from the dead, he ascended up on high, and now sits upon the Father's throne. In him David has a representative who can never be destroyed, and who, in due time, will rear upon this earth a throne, the possessor of which will be both the son of David and the son of the living God. That throne will stand forever, and, in time, all the prophecies respecting the perpetual rule of the seed of David will be fulfilled.

The Son of God came because "God so loved the world." John iii. 16. He gave Himself "for the life of the world." John vi. 51. By the grace of God He tasted death "for every man." Heb. ii. 9. Yet He Himself said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24) although He was sent "that the world through Him might be saved." John iii. 17. Moreover at the very time that Jesus said that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He was about to grant the request of the heathen woman, and heal her daughter. So we see that the house of Israel is restored and built up by the conversion of the Gentiles. "All Israel shall be saved" by the bringing in of "the fullness of the Gentiles." Romans 11:25, 26.

Thus we see that the Gospel which the twelve were sent to preach was not a narrow one. It differed in no respect from that which God sends to us and which we are to proclaim to others. So we are the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and unto us is the word of this

salvation sent. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Then, as ye have freely received, even so, freely give.

Who will inhabit this city?—The answer is, Israel. The city has twelve gates, three on each side, and on these gates are "the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." Rev. 21:12. All who enter that city will have to enter as members of some one of the tribes of Israel.

"Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles to come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Romans 11:25, 26. Israel is now scattered amongst all the nations. There are in all nations on earth some who will allow ungodliness to be turned away from them, and that will constitute them Israel, and they will dwell in the New Jerusalem. "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Matthew 8:11, 12. Who will come to the standard which God sets up for the people? All who will, may come, and none who come will ever be put to shame or confusion because of their confidence.

No; God has not divorced His spouse (Isa. l. 1), nor cast away His people. Romans 11:1. He loves them with tender affection. He will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and will build again the ruins thereof, and will set it up; that the residue of men may seek after the Lord; and this He will do by the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles; for it is only from the Gentiles, the nations, that Israel is taken. God chose Abraham from among the Gentiles, for there was no such thing as a Jew or an Israelite, in name, until long after the days of that patriarch. He called Israel out of Egypt, that through them His name might be made known in all the earth. Their business was to be missionaries to the heathen; but instead of performing their mission, they were content to settle down in the land of Palestine, around Jerusalem. Instead of enlarging the place of their habitation, to include all the world, they became conservative, which is another name for selfish, and shut everybody else away from the blessings which they enjoyed, and thereby lost the blessings themselves. Whoever would exclude another from the blessings of the Lord, excludes himself.

But God's purpose will be carried out. All who are really born from above, having the New Jerusalem for their mother, will make its glories and its power known, until its fame reaches every part of the earth. As a consequence the place that Jerusalem now occupies will be too small; it "shall break forth and spread abroad on the right hand, and on the left" (See Zech. 14:4), and its seed "shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." Jerusalem, as it will be when the Lord appears in His glory, will be such a city as the world has never yet seen.

Jesus said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd." John 10:16. The Lord is the same from the beginning, and His works are always the same. He works no differently in the closing part of the Gospel from what He did in the beginning. He called Abraham when he was but one (Isa. li. 2), and took him from among the heathen. Josh. xxiv. 2, 3. All along in the history of Israel He kept adding to them from among the heathen, as in the case of the harlot Rahab, and Ruth the Moabitess, both of whom are among the ancestors of Christ after the flesh. God also sent prophets to the Gentiles, as in the case of Jonah, warning them to repent; and one prophet, Jeremiah, was even before his birth ordained to be a prophet to the Gentiles.

Israel was begun by the calling of one from among the heathen; it was built up by the calling of others, in spite of the prejudices of those who did not understand the plan of the Lord, and who wished to make Him as exclusive as they were; and the promise still is, "Yet will I gather others to Israel, to those of Israel who are already gathered." And when all have been gathered out, through the preaching of the Gospel, there will then be but one nation in all the earth, for the word of the Lord is, "the Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name One." Zechariah 14:9. The people who are thus gathered to Israel will all be Sabbath keepers. The characteristic of that nation will be that every individual will keep the truth, the law of God. It will be established in righteousness. Isaiah 54:14. Of those it is said, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. There are glorious promises to those Gentiles who keep the Sabbath of the Lord in spirit and in truth, and who by their faith and trust in Christ become members of God's household, the commonwealth of Israel.

As of 2006, Seventh-day Adventists have 14,754,022 baptized members. Just over one million people joined the Adventist church in the twelve month period ending June 2006 (inclusive), through baptisms and professions of faith. The church is one of the world's fastest-growing organizations, primarily due to increases in membership in the developing nations. Today, less than 10% of the world membership reside in the United States, with large numbers in Africa as well as Central and South America. It is believed that over 25 million worship weekly in churches. The church operates in 202 out of 230 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations, making it one of the most widespread Protestant denominations.

The 21st century finds racism, the most important and persistent social problem in America and in the world today. It is on the rise in manifold ways. Whether we are talking about ethnic cleansings, tribal conflicts, warring factions, group hatred, subtle discrimination, terrorism, or retraction of equity laws under the guise of fairness, the underlying result is the same. One group, threatened by a perceived loss of power, exercises social, economic, political, and religious muscle against the other to retain privilege by restructuring for social advantage. Where lies the solution?

God has not written an encyclopedia article for us about *agape*. Instead, He sent His Son to die on a cross, so we could see it. The true dimension of that sacrifice is that it is infinite, complete, and eternal.

Christ went to the grave for us, not because He deserved it, but because we did. In those last few hours as He hung there in the darkness, He drained the cup of all human woe to its dregs. The bright sunshine in which He had walked while on earth was gone. All thought of reward to come fled His mind. He could not see through to the other side of the dark and awful grave that gaped before Him. God is *agape*, and Christ is God, and there He is dying the death we deserve. (The fact that the Father called Him back to life the third day in no way lessens the reality of His total commitment on the cross in our behalf.)

Now we come to something disturbing. It's not enough for us to say, "Fine, glad He went through that; but you mean I must learn to love with *agape*? Impossible!"

We sinful, self-centered mortals can learn to love with *agape*, for John said: "Love [*agape*] is of God, and he who loves [with *agape*] is

born of God and knows God. He who does not love [with *agape*] does not know God; for God is love [*agape*]" (1 John 4:7, 8 RSV).

We miss the point of the New Testament if we miss *agape* in it. We also stay in the dark about what faith is, for New Testament faith is a human heart-appreciation of the "breadth, and length and depth, and height" of the *agape* of Christ (Ephesians 3:18, 19). There can be no real change of heart in righteousness by faith without a true appreciation of it.

Here we are in the last moments of time before the second coming of Christ. The church of the last days is to be distinguished as those who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). How does one truly "keep the commandments"? A sobering answer comes: "*agape* is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Nothing less.

It's the basic idea of God's last message of mercy to the world in Revelation 14:6-12. It must be there if any one can get ready to meet the Lord when He returns in glory! The faith that works miracles today in justification by faith is a melted-heart response to the amazing *agape* displayed in the sacrifice of that Lamb of God. That idea is again "present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

The proclamation of the gospel raises up the fallen tabernacle of David by gathering all Israel from the nations of the world to Jesus. As the apostles fanned out telling their story, the cross became the world's moment of truth. In that lightning flash of revelation, everyone saw himself judged. The cross became the final definition of love; and that's why that word *agape* turned the world upside down. Let it turn your life upside down!

Charles Ball tells the story of how his "grandfather was brought from Africa and sold as a slave in Calvert county, in Maryland. I never understood the name of the ship in which he was imported, nor the name of the planter who bought him on his arrival, but at the time I knew him he was a slave in a family called Maud, who resided near Leonardtown. My father was a slave in a family named Hauty, living near the same place. My mother was the slave of a tobacco planter, who died when I was about four years old. My mother had several children, and they were sold upon master's death to separate purchasers. She was sold, my father told me, to a Georgia trader. I, of all her children, was the only one left in Maryland. When sold I was naked, never having had on clothes in my life, but my new master gave me a child's frock, belonging to one of his own children. After he



had purchased me, he dressed me in this garment, took me before him on his horse, and started home; but my poor mother, when she saw me leaving her for the last time, ran after me, took me down from the horse, clasped me in her arms, and wept loudly and bitterly over me. My master seemed to pity her; and endeavored to soothe her distress by telling her that he would be a good master to me, and that I should not want anything. She then, still holding me in her arms, walked along the road beside the horse as he moved slowly, and earnestly and imploringly besought my master to buy her and the rest of her children, and not permit them to be carried away by the negro buyers; but whilst thus entreating him to save her and her family, the slave-driver, who had first bought her, came running in pursuit of her with a raw-hide in his hand. When he overtook us, he told her he was her master now, and ordered her to give that little negro to its owner, and come back with him. My mother then turned to him and cried, 'Oh, master, do not take me from my child!' Without making any reply, he gave her two or three heavy blows on the shoulders with his raw-hide, snatched me from her arms, handed me to my master, and seizing her by one arm, dragged her back towards the place of sale. My master then quickened the pace of his horse; and as we advanced, the cries of my poor parent became more and more indistinct—at length they died away in the distance, and I never again heard the voice of my poor mother. Young as I was, the horrors of that day sank deeply into my heart, and even at this time, though half a century has elapsed, the terrors of the scene return with painful vividness upon my memory."<sup>1</sup>

Imagine a crucified man on a cross: crowds come to jeer at him as today we flock to a ball game. Like an old, wrecked car that children throw rocks at, he is a human write off, abandoned to be mocked and abused in horror unspeakable. You must not even feel or express pity or sympathy for him, for if you do, you disagree with God's judgment of him! You are on God's side if you throw rotten eggs or tomatoes at him. So people thought. This was the death that Jesus became "obedient" to. In His despair He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus was forsaken on His cross that no human being might ever be forsaken!

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains: Or, the Life of an American Slave*, New York: H. Dayton, 1859, pp. 9-11. Electronic edition, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1997, accessed 9 September 2000, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/ball/menu.html>.