

A Garden Enclosed

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

This week, as I read through the beginning of the eighth and final Letter to Rachel, I was inspired with a very simple, but quite critical, message that I have called “A Garden Enclosed.”

The eighth letter begins by talking about the Book of Revelation as the culmination of all that has come before it in the Bible. It takes the symbols of the Old Testament, and the principles of the New Testament, and shows how they all come together to take redeemed humanity through the final trials of earth, and on into the glory that lies beyond human history.

In a very real sense, the Book of Revelation is a unique portion of the Scriptures. It is, all by itself, a third Testament, for whereas the previous two (“Old” and “New”) testify of Yahshua, the final book is a “Revelation” of Yahshua, showing Him plainly to the world through the events that it describes. This book of prophecy cannot be neglected or minimized in the slightest if we wish to truly be lovers of, and followers of, the Lamb of Yah... and yet so many who claim to be Christ’s ignore this book altogether, considering it to be cryptic, too strange, for them to spend much time on. And yet, if Yah gave us this book as a gift, it must be a necessary gift – and we must understand it and appreciate it as we do all His other promises and blessings to mankind.

One of the things that this final Letter to Rachel examines is the Ark of the Covenant seen within the Heavenly Temple as Revelation describes. I spend some time talking to Rachel about the various arks of the Bible, from Noah’s Ark, to Moses’ Ark, to the Ark of the Covenant, and finally the Heavenly Ark from which the 10 Commandments were shown to John in his vision. (Rev 11:19)

So I ask, “What is an Ark?”

The word itself has no meaning in Hebrew; apparently it was originally a Hittite word meaning to “hold” something, and then it was passed to Moses through Egypt with which the Hittites had diplomatic exchanges. This, of course, gives further evidence of the Mosaic authorship of the first few books of the Bible and also defines the term as being a reference to a “container.” It is perhaps because the word is not the typical expression for a container that Yahweh used it with His people, for the purpose of emphasizing the significant value of those things that are kept in objects described as “arks.”

The Singer describes his Beloved in this way, which is often used as a symbolic reference to Christ and His Bride: “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” (Songs 4:12)

This symbol is persistent throughout the Old Testament, from Noah tending a vineyard after the Flood to the prophecies of later figures such as Isaiah, who wrote, “Now will I sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved touching His vineyard. My Well-beloved hath a vineyard in a

very fruitful hill, and He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein.” (Isa 5:1, 2a)

A few verses later the symbolism is made plain: “the vineyard of Yahweh of Hosts is the house of Israel; and the men of Judah His pleasant plant,” (verse 7) and Yahshua uses the same language in the parable of the Workers (Mat 20:1) and again in the parable of the Vineyard. (Mat 21:33)

It should seem obvious, then, that if our Father has been known to enclose precious things in objects described as “arks,” and if we are directly told that His Garden and His Vineyard are “enclosed” and “fenced,” then we should be able to describe the New Testament Church in the context of this “vessel.”

In other words, Yah has enclosed the Church, with the “pleasant plant” of His People, inside of something designed to keep it safe. In fact, there are several “arks” into which our Father has placed His people for their protection, and in this study we can identify four of them, although there may well be other valid interpretations that fulfill the pattern.

The first of the four arks is the Decalogue, the set of the Ten Commandments. As we know, the commandments of Yah were given to mankind, not for any benefit to the Almighty; but they were for our sakes, as it is written, “Ye shall walk in all the ways which Yahweh your Elohim hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.” (Deu 5:33)

The commandments were given to us to reveal to us what righteousness means to our Father, and ultimately to teach us what “love” means in the language of the Most High. In both the Old and New Testaments, Yah has declared that obedience to His commandments reveals love for Him and for our fellow man – and of course in other studies we have gone over each of the elements of the Decalogue and shown how each and every item is a description of agape.

In the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in the prophecies of John, disobedience results in destruction. This is not because Yah becomes “angry” in any carnal sense with the transgressors, but because rejection of the 10 Commandments is rebellion against life itself, and a choice from which even our Creator cannot protect us. Ever since the entrance of sin into the universe, everlasting death has become a very real possibility for every created being, including the angels, and the Law of Yah is a tool, generated from His own character, that prevents this from coming to pass in all that receive it.

The second of the four arks is the Covenant. In fact, one of the three physical arks in the Bible is called the “Ark of The Covenant.” The literal object was the gold-plated box in which the tablets of the Law were kept, but in the spiritual, New Testament, sense it is the covenant itself – the agreement with Elohim – that is the protection.

It is written, “‘As for me, this is my covenant with them,’ saith Yahweh, ‘My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed,’ saith Yahweh, ‘from henceforth and for ever.’” (Isa 59:21)

It is also written, “‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ saith Yahweh, ‘I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.’” (Heb 8:10)

Notice that the 10 Commandments are not specifically mentioned in any of these verses. They are the “foundation” of the covenant, but the covenant itself is the agreement, the contracted and witnessed agreement, between the Father and each and every member of His Church.

Now, what does that look like? In this generation it is the membership covenant, a concept lightly regarded outside of the Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church. The fact that we place emphasis on things on earth being done “as they are in Heaven,” with signatures, witnesses, and an earthly reflection of the “Book of Life” following Baptism, sets us uniquely apart from those who follow the Lamb only according to their own limited understanding.

Yahweh does not make agreements lightly, nor does He ever do so “informally.” We have other studies in which we discuss covenants in detail, and they always involve an agreement, conditions, and a token of commitment. This formal agreement functions as a protective vessel for Yah’s people; thus, those who reject the membership covenant, just as those who neglect the 10 Commandments, are turning away from a gift specifically given to us by the Father to prepare us for everlasting life.

Again, this is not an arbitrary “decision” on the Father’s part. Among those who have studied with us over the years, we have heard a number of reasons for non-commitment to this divinely-appointed ordinance pertaining to salvation (some less reasonable than others – but none Scriptural), but it inevitably boils down to a fear of judgment, a fear of sanctification, and a decision to try and relate to Yahweh according to their own ways, rather than His. The inevitable results of this subtle rebellion should go without saying; for as it was in the days of Noah, so it is now at the end, with few appreciating and receiving the protection Yahweh offers from the overwhelming flood.

The third ark of protection that our Father places around His people is the set of Church doctrines. Of course, like the Law, and like Church membership, Church doctrines do not “save” anyone. Yahshua is the end of the Law for righteousness, and righteousness only comes through the indwelling power and Spirit of the Son of Man. This does not mean that they have no purpose, no vital part to play in the salvation process, however, for that selfsame Son of Man has appointed us these things... and He did not do so in error.

The Church's doctrines, as extensions and explanations of the Law, provide a general consensus among the Spirit-led members of the Body regarding beliefs and practices. As Paul writes to the Colossians, it is not carnal man that decides issues regarding Sabbaths, New Moons, Feast days, and matters of food and drink. That is the domain of the "mind of Christ" as expressed through His people. While no one individual is to think himself or herself to be the "voice of God" on the earth, when the Church, in the faithful fulfillment of its duties, comes to a decision, it is written that this is "bound" or "loosed" in Heaven as well as on earth. (Mat 18:18)

The way that Yah's Church conducts voting, and reviews and revises both new and old Light, this is a powerful protection from the insinuations of Satan. We see evidence of this in the New Testament itself, in the writings of Paul, Peter, John, and the others, who warned against both general heretical doctrines (such as Gnosticism) and specific individuals who sought to disrupt the sanctification of the saints. (e.g., 3John 1:9, 10)

Finally, and perhaps the most personal of the arks, is Yahshua's own divine character. The principles of Yahshua's character are explained in the Law, expressed in the Church covenant, and expounded in the Church's doctrines. All these things are really One, but each aspect has its place in understanding our Father's purpose for His people.

The principles of Yahshua's character, when lived out in a born-again believer, give life and personality to the Holy Spirit dwelling within, and ensure that the individual is truly safe from the Enemy. The principles of Yahshua's character, received and manifested, are the victory doctrine itself, for those who walk according to Yahshua's spirit cannot sin, do always those things that please the Father, "but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1John 5:18) The victory message, which is simply the death of "self" and the birth of "Christ" in an individual, is the Ark of Yah around that individual.

Now, many claim to be "born again," but when this is the true Ark of the soul, and not a counterfeit vessel, the other Arks are added. Those who are born again come into harmony with the Ten Commandments, they eagerly – quickly – seek out baptism and Church membership among their fellow saints, and they become diligent students of the Church's doctrines and principles. They do these things, not so much because they fear offending, but because they long to learn more and ever more about how Christ's Person is revealed in these beliefs and doctrines, that covenant, and those laws.

Now as I have said, none of these things "save," although salvation is impossible without them. We might consider that a fence around a house does not "save" a child from traffic. Determined children will find ways around the fence, just as sinners and nominal Christians alike find ways to justify disobedience to the Law and their commitments.

But what truly keeps us safe is a respect for, and an understanding of, that fence. We know why it is there, so we want to stay within. That is about our character. Even if there are gaps in the fence, even if there are gaps in our understanding of the Law or the principles of love, we are not

the type seeking to escape its confines. We are still safe from traffic because we desire to stay within the security of Yah's presence, within His Garden, and so we actively stay out of danger.

The Law, and Church membership, and Church doctrines, are often misunderstood as constraints in a negative sense. Like a fence, they are enclosures as the Bible states... but what they signify, what they mean, is protection, and a blessing, a chance to grow like a young vine – in safety away from predators and natural disasters. They are indeed a boundary, but one that, if we understand it, and love our Father for placing it there, we will joyfully embrace.

Those who despise the Father's gifts, whether they are the Sabbath and the other Commandments or the Church and its covenant, reveal that they really do not know the character or intentions of the gift-Giver. Because they are not safely within these spiritual "arks," they cannot escape being swept away and destroyed by the waters of the spiritual Flood that we have been warned are about to break upon the world.

But we see that, even though we may speak of several "arks," they all connect through the character and Person of Yahshua Himself. At the heart of all things, it is He who keeps us safe from the flood by means of these diverse methods. We abide in Him as He abides in us. He preserves us in this world, and we preserve and promote His Gospel among men. In this arrangement there is mutual protection, and mutual service, even though there are clearly defined roles – just as in the Biblical pattern of a marriage. In the way the Father protects and keeps His people, as a Garden Enclosed, so we see again the symbolism of the Divine Marriage.

To this marriage all are invited. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come," and we are the agents of this invitation. Let us, clothed in the wedding garments ourselves, seek out the other guests, that there may be joy in the Father's House for all who have sought and found the safety of His love.

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