

# The Church Without Walls



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:11-22, Col. 1:20-22.*

**Memory Text:** “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (*Ephesians 2:14, NKJV*).

**T**he impossible possibility:  $1 + 1 = 1$ . Impossible? Not so when it comes to the mathematics of the gospel of Christ. Paul's forceful message this week is: What is impossible in human equation is possible under divine power and provision. Christ has created “in Himself one new man from the two” (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*), and this He did only through His blood, shed on the cross in behalf of all humanity, Jews and Gentiles.

The transforming power of the Cross creates a new humanity in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Gal. 3:28, 29, NKJV*). The good news is that while differences may exist between persons, genders, cultures, races, and nations, the ultimate divine purpose is to bring all created order into one unity “in Christ” (*Eph. 1:10*). All these distinctions, though real, are superseded by the unity we have in Jesus.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was the position of Gentiles before they found Christ? What was the end purpose of God in making Israel His chosen people? How were the walls of separation between people torn down? What were the results of Christ's ministry of reconciliation? In what sense are we God's family and temple?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.

## **Outside of Christ: Alienation** (*Eph. 2:11, 12*)

Having shown in the first part of Ephesians 2 that God’s grace has brought the free gift of salvation to individuals, the apostle, from verse 11, shifts his focus to what God has done to bring about reconciliation to hitherto divided communities.

**In Ephesians 2:11, 12 Paul mentions four disabilities of the Gentiles who lived without Christ. Identify them:**

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Paul begins on a practical note. Name-calling is both unchristian and offensive. Jews called the Gentiles uncircumcised in a derogatory sense and called themselves circumcised in a sense of pride. Paul declares the futility of such name-calling by saying the circumcision of the Jews was, after all, “made in the flesh by hands” (*Eph. 2:11, NKJV*). Although circumcision had its spiritual significance at one time, now in Christ it is surpassed by the circumcision of the heart—a spiritual covenant available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

**In Romans Paul lists the privileges of the Jews (*Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:3-5*). What were those privileges, and in light of what Paul said here about the state of the Gentiles, what responsibilities should have come with those privileges and advantages?**

In contrast to the Jews, the Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of God. They had no part in the covenant of promise. They had no hope and, hence, no future. Worst of all, they had no true God, even though they had “many gods” and “many lords” (*1 Cor. 8:5, NKJV*). All they had was this world with its twisted philosophy, lurid pleasures, and pagan lifestyles. That was the plight of the Gentiles; in many ways this reflects the plight of all who live in the darkness of sin and separation from God.

**Hostility between two groups is nothing new in history. While we may be quick to condemn the hostility between Jews and Gentiles as being unchristian, are there areas in which we exhibit such hostility? What can you or your local church do to eliminate hostility between differing groups in your community?**

## In Christ: Nearness *(Eph. 2:13)*

**“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ”** *(Eph. 2:13, NKJV)*.

“But now.” Two little words introduce a theme that changed the course of redemptive history. At one time the Gentiles were without Christ, outside God’s commonwealth, without the covenant of promise, without hope and God. “But now” heaven has intervened in the person of Christ to deal with the tragic and pathetic situation the Gentiles were in.

**In** choosing Israel, God “called them to preserve among men the knowledge of His law, and of the symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Saviour. He desired them to be as wells of salvation to the world. . . . They were to reveal God to men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 27. How does Israel’s call relate to us, as Adventists, today?

The words *far* and *near* describe the position of the Gentiles and the Jews. The rabbis proudly claimed that no nation is as near to God as Israel. That was true as part of God’s covenant with Israel; however, “nearness” was not to be understood as exclusiveness but, rather, as a communication privilege from which was to flow a witnessing duty to those who were “far”; that is, to the Gentiles. Israel failed in this duty. Isaiah predicted the day when the distance between “far” and “near” will disappear and peace will come to both *(Isa. 57:19)*.

To Paul, that Messianic day has come “by the blood of Christ” *(Eph. 2:13)*. One privilege the Jews held dear was that of being near to God’s temple and thus near to God’s mercy seat. The sacrificial blood played a crucial role in the temple rituals in the forgiveness of sins and keeping the Jews near God’s presence. The apostle moves from the blood of the animal to the blood of Christ, through which “a new and living way [has] opened for us” in order that we may “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” *(Heb. 10:20, 22, NIV)*.

In Christ, distance disappears. There is nearness, heavenly citizenship, promise, hope, and peace.

**Ancient Israel believed it had been given special light and truth. And it had! Yet, look what spiritual pride had done to the nation. How do we as Adventists, who also believe we have been given special light and truth (and we have!), protect ourselves from this danger?**

## No More Walls (*Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:14, 15*)

**The** blood of Jesus has eliminated the distance between those who were afar and those who were near; that is, it eliminated the distance between Jew and Gentile (*Eph. 2:13*). How? Why? In what ways does Christ's shed blood show that we are all the same? See *Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18*.

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From now on, Christ "Himself is our peace" (*Eph. 2:14, NKJV*). Christ—and no one else! As our peace, what did Christ do?

First, He "has broken down the middle wall of separation" (*vs. 14, NKJV*). The wall points to more than the temple wall that cut off the court of the Gentiles from other areas to which only Jews had access. It refers to religious, social, and political divisions that kept the two groups apart. But in dying for the sins of all humanity, Christ has brought peace in two dimensions: vertically, between God and humanity; horizontally, between person and person. The former proclaims that God loves all alike; the latter demands that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal. 3:28, NKJV*).

Second, Christ "abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*). Though there's been a great debate over which law Paul is talking about here (moral or ceremonial), Paul's point is that through Christ anything that had divided Jews and Gentiles has been abolished in Jesus. All are now united in Him. Christ brought peace, and hence Paul says: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything" (*Gal. 6:15, NKJV*).

Third, Christ created "in Himself one new man from the two" (*Eph. 2:15, NKJV*). That is the gospel mathematics:  $1 + 1 = 1$ . The impossibility becomes possible. No more Jew, no more Gentile, but one new creation (*2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV*) in which people define their status not in terms of caste, color, gender, nationality, or tribe but in terms of an abiding relationship with the Christ of the Cross. "Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society, in fact a new humanity. . . . And this new human unity in Christ is the pledge and foretaste of that final unity under Christ's headship."—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 93.

**What prejudices might you be clinging to that go contrary to what we have been promised in Christ regarding the "new humanity"? How can you change?**

## Reconciliation and Access *(2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:16-18, Col. 1:20-22)*

**Read** the verses listed above for today. Summarize the basic message found in them. How do you understand the reconciliation talked about in these verses?

What great privileges we have in Christ! Aliens are now citizens. The hopeless have received hope. Those without God have found Him. The walls of division are gone. A new creation of unity has emerged. Christ Himself has become our peace. In Ephesians 2:16-18 Paul expounds upon the reality and totality of what Christ has done.

First, peace is real because Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles “to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (*vs. 16, NKJV*). Christ has reconciled what was irreconcilable—that is, the Jew and the Gentile. He did this, neither by impressing upon the Jews the need to accommodate the Gentiles nor by converting the Gentiles to the religious system of the Jews, which was by far superior to anything the Gentiles had. Christ accomplished the reconciliation of the Jew and the Gentile by dealing with a problem common to both—the problem of sin, which is the cause of all enmity. The Cross reconciled both Jew and Gentile with God, and that reconciliation became the basis of their unity in “one body,” which is the church without walls.

Second, the totality of the peace is underscored by the apostle in verse 18: “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (*NKJV*). The entire Godhead—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—is involved in this process of reconciliation and peace, both vertically with God and horizontally between people. But that’s not all. Both Jews and Gentiles have one common *access* to God through one Spirit. There can be no more walls separating Jews and Gentiles in either worship or fellowship.

The word *access* in Greek usage pictures someone being presented to the king in his throne room. Through Christ, both Gentiles and Jews—indeed, all believers—have common access to the very presence of God. Both the one who was an alien and far away and the one who was near and a citizen are ushered into the throne room of God by the same Spirit. Thus, peace and reconciliation in Christ is total and real.

**Though the context here is Jew and Gentile, it could really be between any number of different groups, regardless of what divides them. What barriers stand in the way of fully realizing this ideal, and what can be done to remove them?**

## “The Household of God” (*Eph. 2:19-22*)

From tragedy to joy. From alienation to fellowship. From Gentiles and Jews to one new humanity. The saving work of Christ has accomplished all this, and now the apostle introduces the believers to their new status. Ephesians 2:19-22 lists three attributes of that standing.

First, citizenship. Outside of Christ, Gentiles were strangers and foreigners and had no share in the “commonwealth of Israel” (*Eph. 2:12*). But in Christ they become “fellow citizens with the saints” (*vs. 19, NKJV*). The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God has two aspects. The kingdom of grace is in operation now as people repent of their sin and accept the salvation offered by Christ. The kingdom of glory will be established when Christ comes the second time to gather His saints home. Without being citizens of the first, we cannot be citizens of the second.

**What** are the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship? If our citizenship is in heaven, what does God expect of us here? Find verses to defend your answer.

Second, membership in God’s household. A Christian is not only a citizen but a member of God’s family. The word *family* evokes a relationship of closeness, equality, and dignity. Parents and children are not distant and empty shadows but share a warm and intimate relationship in which love reigns supreme. They have an obligation to one another, and together to the family; likewise, in God’s family, which is the church.

The church, says Paul, is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (*Eph. 2:20, NKJV*). Surely, the man who affirmed that Christ is the only foundation (*1 Cor. 3:11*) cannot reverse himself here in suggesting a human foundation. Christ as the Cornerstone (*cf. 1 Pet. 2:6*) holds together the various parts of the house, giving strength and unity to it.

**If** the church is like a family, how should the members treat each other? Find verses anywhere in Scripture to support your answer.

Third, we are God’s temple. The union of all believers in God and the unity between alienated groups serves the end purpose of being God’s holy sanctuary, “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (*Eph. 2:22, NKJV*). A church without walls becomes God’s holy temple (*1 Cor. 3:16*).

**Write out a paragraph that envisions the ideal “church without walls.” What would that be like? How closely does your local church embody this great principle?**

**Further Study:** *Prejudice and disunity.* “The same agencies that barred men away from Christ eighteen hundred years ago are at work today. The spirit which built up the partition wall between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes of men. Christ and His mission have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the ministry of the gospel. But let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ. There are no barriers which man or Satan can erect but that faith can penetrate. . . .

“Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 “Therefore remember . . .” says Ephesians 2:11 (NKJV). Why does Paul want us to remember our past condition? Cf. Deut. 15:15, 16:12, 32:7. Have those who are willing talk about what Christ has spared them from and the great changes He has wrought in their lives. Though it’s not good to dwell on the past too much, why is it good to remember what we have come out of?
- 2 Mahatma Gandhi once observed that as long as Christians practice caste, Hindus have no need to worry about getting converted. How have Christians been guilty of practicing the caste system? What does this say about racism’s effect on religion? In what ways has racism impacted even our own church?
- 3 Peace with God and peace with one another form the basis of Christian life and relationship. There’s only one problem: A great deal of division and disunity exists within the Christian church itself. How can you explain this discrepancy and what can be done to help heal it?
- 4 There will, of course, in heaven be none of the kind of hateful divisions we have here on earth. What does this tell us about how important it is for us to work at getting rid of such divisions now?

# Hungry for God's Love

by J. H. ZACHARY

Dina Rosa grew up in a Jewish home. She studied Hebrew and attended Sabbath services. When she married, she was determined to bring up her children in the Jewish faith.

When the family moved to Florida, Dina took her children to the local synagogue. But after the service, one of the synagogue leaders told Dina that her children were too young to sit quietly, and their noise disturbed the service. This troubled Dina, who wanted her children to love their faith. Dina began worshiping with her children at home on Sabbath.

One day a friend showed Dina an invitation she had received to visit the Adventist Messianic Center in town. Dina had never heard of Adventists and was not sure what a Messianic Center was, but the center was close to her home, so she decided to visit it. She and her children went, and they were warmly welcomed.

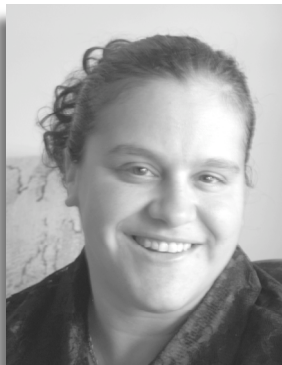
"Everyone was so friendly," Dina said. "I enjoyed the Hebrew songs, and I felt the people were honestly glad I was there."

Dina was impressed with the message that Rabbi Jeff Zaremsky presented from the Torah. The rabbi's clear teaching awakened in Dina a desire to learn more about the Scriptures, and soon Dina joined a Bible-study class. "I was shown clearly from the Bible that Yeshua [Jesus] is the Messiah that was promised by God in the Torah. It is right there in the Scriptures," she said. Dina was baptized into the Beth-El Shalom congregation of Seventh-day Adventists.

"I thank God that I now know Yeshua as my Savior," Dina says. "My faith in God has helped me through some tough times."

Dina leads the center's Pathfinder club and is developing a Pathfinder honor that focuses on Jewish heritage.

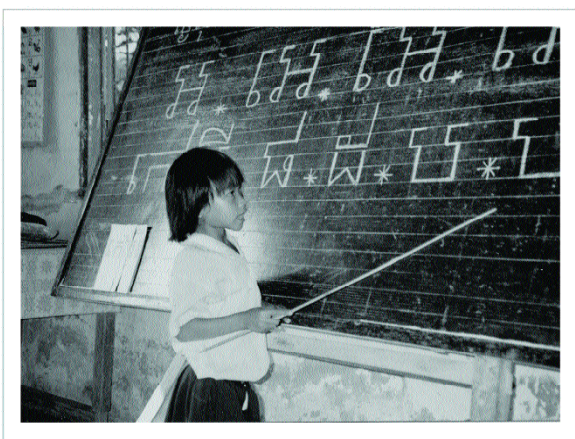
Today at least thirteen Adventist Jewish congregations in North America reach out to Jewish neighbors. Pray that God's children will hear His call to come to know the Messiah through this ministry.



DINA ROSA (left). Until his death, J. H. ZACHARY coordinated outreach among the Jews and Muslims in the North American Division.



**AD**



# Give them room to grow

After years of brutal genocide in Cambodia, the Adventist church is starting to grow. In 1990, there were no Adventists; today there are more than 5,000. These new believers need support and nurture.

The Adventist church in Cambodia is operating a school in the capital, Phnom Penh, with 340 students. It's located in a house. A single house. Let's give them space to grow.

Part of your Mission Offering this quarter will help make this dream a reality.

## MISSION

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