

# A Song for the Sanctuary

Celebrating its goodness, its truth, its beauty

BY RICHARD M. DAVIDSON



If you had only one request to make of the Lord, only one goal to seek in life, what would you choose? A whole array of possibilities comes to mind. But in Scripture there is a singular and striking answer to this question. In Psalm 27:4, David unequivocally states: "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (NIV).

David's singular focus is upon "the house of the Lord"—the sanctuary! When David wrote this psalm, he was

"a hunted fugitive, finding refuge in the rocks and caves of the wilderness."<sup>1</sup> His greatest longing was to be continually in the presence of the Lord in His sanctuary. But David's central focus upon the sanctuary was not unique to this time of special circumstances. Many of David's psalms focus upon the sanctuary; in fact, the entire Psalter is really the Hebrew hymnal to be used in worship at the sanctuary.

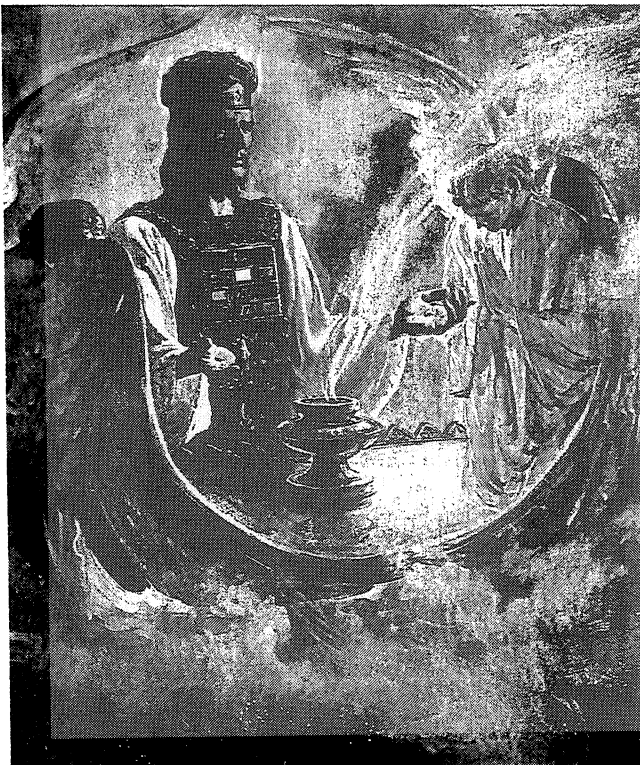
The whole life of ancient Israel revolved around the sanctuary. At the sanctuary there was joyous commemoration of God's mighty acts of deliverance in the past. From the sanctuary came present forgiveness, peace, assurance. And through the earthly sanctuary the worshiper was pointed upward to the heavenly sanctuary, and forward to the great antitypical Sacrifice and Priest of the heavenly sanctuary.

The Scriptures are replete with sanctuary material. In the Old Testament some 90 chapters are devoted entirely to the subject of the sanctuary, not to mention the 150 psalms comprising the sanctuary hymnody and hundreds of other scattered references to the sanctuary. In the New Testament Gospels and Epistles, the Messiah is repeatedly proclaimed as the one who brings fulfillment to the typical meaning of the sanctuary and its services. His earthly ministry and passion, and His heavenly work, are described

largely in the language of the sanctuary. And in the climactic Apocalypse of John, every major section is introduced by a scene from the sanctuary; the entire book is suffused with sanctuary concerns.

Like David and ancient Israel, like the various Bible writers, Adventists since 1844 have had our sights set on the sanctuary. For the Adventist pioneers, "the subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great Advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people."<sup>2</sup>

What is the nature of the sanctuary experience that David sought, that ancient Israel embraced, that Adventists treasure? Recently I have been delighted to see how David's singular "psalm for the sanctuary," Psalm 27, in the space of a few verses draws together all the major strands of the sanctuary message and experience. In the process David reveals how the sanctuary message is the encapsulation of the triple star of value in human experience. The philosophers summarize what is of ultimate worth in life in three words: beauty, truth, and goodness. David finds the embodiment of all these in the sanctuary.



## Beauty

Psalm 27:4 tells us the first goal of David in the sanctuary experience: “to behold the beauty of the Lord.” The Hebrew word *no<sup>s</sup>am*, here translated “beauty,” refers to more than abstract aesthetic form. It is a dynamic term, describing beauty that moves the beholder by its loveliness, its pleasantness. Beauty with emotive power—aesthetic experience. David longs to behold this beauty of the Lord in the sanctuary. The psalmist writes elsewhere: “Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (Ps. 96:6). “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness [or better, in holy beauty]” (Ps. 29:2; 96:9).

While a seminary student I first caught a vision of the holy beauty of the Lord in His heavenly sanctuary (especially from Isaiah 6), and as a young pastor, fresh in my “first love” of understanding righteousness by faith, I was introduced to the aesthetic embodiment of the gospel in the types of the Old Testament sanctuary services.<sup>3</sup> The beauty of the gospel in sanctuary typology has continued to shine ever more brilliantly for me in my study, as I have seen how the Old Testament types so forcefully and consistently foreshadow Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice and His high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>4</sup> I have been overjoyed to see how every type is fulfilled not only objectively in Jesus, but also how as we are “in Christ,” we experientially participate in that fulfillment.

The sanctuary—bastion of beauty!

## Truth

Of course, the aesthetic dimension is not the whole. David desires not only “to behold the beauty of the Lord” but also “to enquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:4). The Hebrew word translated

“inquire” is *baqar*, a rare word in the Old Testament with a rich meaning. It refers not merely to making inquiry, but has implications of intellectual reflection, of diligent seeking, searching out, detailed examination of evidence to determine the truth of a matter. The sanctuary message is not only an experience of awesome beauty; it is also a reflective, diligent search for truth.

The present truth of the sanctuary message is particularly concentrated in the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation. Books with messages specifically addressed to those living in the last days of earth’s history. The sanctuary is at the heart of each of these books.

As the storm of debate over the truthfulness of the sanctuary doctrine has swirled in the Adventist Church throughout the past decade, many have been constrained to reexamine the evidence for the veracity of the sanctuary message proclaimed by the Adventist movement since 1844. The Daniel and Revelation Committee has produced seven volumes during this decade, with much of the material directly relating to the sanctuary. Fresh, exciting insights have emerged from this intense period of intellectual inquiry, which have confirmed the historic Adventist understanding of the biblical material. The basic pillars of this doctrine—the historicist view of prophecy, the year-day principle, the beginning and ending dates for the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, the ongoing pre-Advent investigative judgment in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary since 1844—all these stand even more firmly in the light of the closest scriptural investigation.<sup>5</sup>

A little more than a decade ago I was ready to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of doubts about the sanctuary doctrine. But over the past few years point by point the objections and questions in my

mind have steadily melted away like hoarfrost before the light of Scripture. My own conviction of the veracity of the historic Adventist position on the sanctuary is stronger than ever before, but now it is a more informed conviction, based upon better biblical evidence than I ever dreamed existed.

## Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

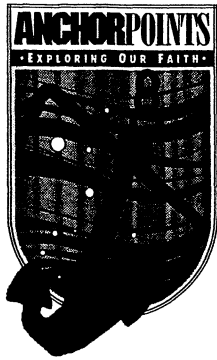
*There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)*

Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,  
No. 23.

The sanctuary—temple of truth!

## Goodness

But it is not enough to see the beauty of sanctuary typology and the truth of sanctuary eschatol-



ogy. The sanctuary is not just an object to occupy the mind in aesthetic contemplation or intellectual stimulation. For many Adventists, the sanctuary has been just that—an object to look at, but not a living reality. What is the *relevancy of the sanctuary doctrine*? What difference does it make in our personal lives?

David addresses these questions in verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 27. He introduces the verses with the word “for” or “because” (Heb. *ki*). Here is the practical application of the sanctuary message in his own life: “For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me” (NIV). David writes this psalm while he is a fugitive hiding from King Saul. Saul and his army—David’s enemies—were malicious witnesses (see verse 12) who had falsely accused David of insurrection against the government. David

desperately needed protection in his “day of trouble.” He also needed vindication from the false charges brought against him. For David, the message of the sanctuary was a promise of protection in God’s tent, and vindication in His tabernacle.

This is precisely the meaning of the pre-Advent investigative judgment that Adventists have the privilege of

proclaiming. In the day of trouble (both present and final) God’s people, who trust in His covering, cleansing righteousness, will be protected—“find sanctuary”—in His celestial temple. And from that heavenly sanctuary will come full vindication from false charges against both God’s people and their Messiah, the new David, the King of the universe! The meaning of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is indeed good news!<sup>6</sup>

David’s practical experience of protection and vindication is summarized later in Psalm 27 as “the goodness of the Lord” (verse 13). The thought of God’s goodness spontaneously leads David into an experience of joyous worship (verse 6): “At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord” (NIV).

Adventists have too often become so enamored with the details of the sanctuary typology and symbology, so exercised over the intricacies of eschatological events in the heavenly temple, that they have neglected to praise the goodness of God! But we need only to go to the book of Psalms, where we look into the heart of the true worshiper, and we see that the Holy One is “enthroned on the praises of Israel” (Ps. 22:3, RSV). Both heavenly sanctuary and earthly counterpart are overflowing with paeons of pure praise. The sanctuary is not only soteriology, not only eschatology; it is preeminently and eternally—doxology!

But David’s praise was not a frothy emotionalism. He said it was bound up with the bloody sacrifice he offered at the sanctuary (Ps. 27:6). His joy was rooted in the assuring and cleansing blood of the Lamb of God, his substitute and surety. His worship at the sanctuary was a spiral of ever-deepening repentance and ever-heightening joy (Ps. 51). Such

worship will be the precious experience of all God’s people who are living in “the hour of his judgment” (Rev 14:7).<sup>7</sup>

### The Ultimate Sanctuary Experience

For all that has been said about the importance of the sanctuary, we must hasten to underscore that the apex of the sanctuary message is not the sanctuary itself.

Often in the Psalms (and elsewhere in Scripture) the biblical author structures his literary message in a special pattern called a chiasm. This means that the first half of the psalm is like a mirror image of the second half, with the various parts in reverse parallelism to each other. It also usually means that the central part of the psalm, the climax, indicates the main focus of the psalm. Psalm 27 is composed in this beautiful chiasmic structure. What is significant for our purposes here is that the sanctuary, though a prominent feature of this “psalm of the sanctuary,” is not the apex. The high point or central focus of the psalm is in verse 8:

You have said, “Seek My face.”

My heart says to You, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.”

The ultimate meaning of the sanctuary is personal fellowship with the God of the sanctuary. This was made clear when God first gave instructions for building the earthly tabernacle: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). The heavenly sanctuary is where Jesus is now ministering for us; and He *now* invites *us* to enter the sacred celestial precincts by faith, to “seek His face.”<sup>8</sup> He invites us spiritually to dwell “in heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6) in the house of the Lord. The sanctuary is not only an object of beauty, a true doctrine, correct behavior, or occasional festival of praise. It is a *way of life*, in constant intimate fellowship with

### The Glory of the Heavenly

“The matchless splendor of the earthly tabernacle reflected to human vision the glories of that heavenly temple where Christ our forerunner ministers for us before the throne of God. The abiding place of the King of kings, where thousand thousands minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him (Dan. 7:10); that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory. Yet important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work there carried forward for man’s redemption were taught by the earthly sanctuary and its services.”

*The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

our Beloved in His heavenly abode, His celestial palace.

We can enter now by faith; by faith we can seek His presence, and experience a personal relationship. Yet we wait for the consummation. As did David, we encourage ourselves with the final words of Psalm 27 (verse 14): "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!" (RSV).

"Wait." The Hebrew word denotes not quiet inactivity, but eager anticipation—standing on tiptoes, as it were, to watch expectantly in hope. If we are in Christ, we do not need to fear the investigative judgment, the time of trouble. Rather, like David (Ps. 26:1; 35:24; 43:1; etc.), we can welcome, even long for, the judgment! With

the judgment will come vindication, and the full revelation of the Lord in His sanctuary.

At the end of the antitypical day of atonement, after the millennium, the camp will be clean. A loud voice from the throne will cry, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" (Rev. 21:3). The eternal "Feast of Tabernacles" will commence.<sup>9</sup> In fellowship with our God, we will gain ever-expanding, incomparable vistas of beauty, truth, and goodness, singing the ultimate "song of the sanctuary." ≡

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

<sup>3</sup> Especially influential were the studies of Leslie Hardinge, now available in his new book, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary* (Harrisburg, Pa: American Cassette Ministries, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See the author's published dissertation, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> See the author's article "In Confirmation

of the Sanctuary Message," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2, No. 1 (Spring 1991): 93-114.

<sup>6</sup> See the author's article "The Good News of Yom Kippur," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2, No. 2 (Autumn 1991): 4-27.

<sup>7</sup> See my discussion of this "balanced" spiral, and its implications for Adventist life-style and worship during the antitypical day of atonement, in "The Good News of Yom Kippur," pp. 13-20.

<sup>8</sup> See the elaboration of this theme especially in Hebrews: 4:3, 16; 6:19, 20; 10:19-22; and 12:22-24.

<sup>9</sup> See the author's "Sanctuary Typology," pp. 124-126.



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