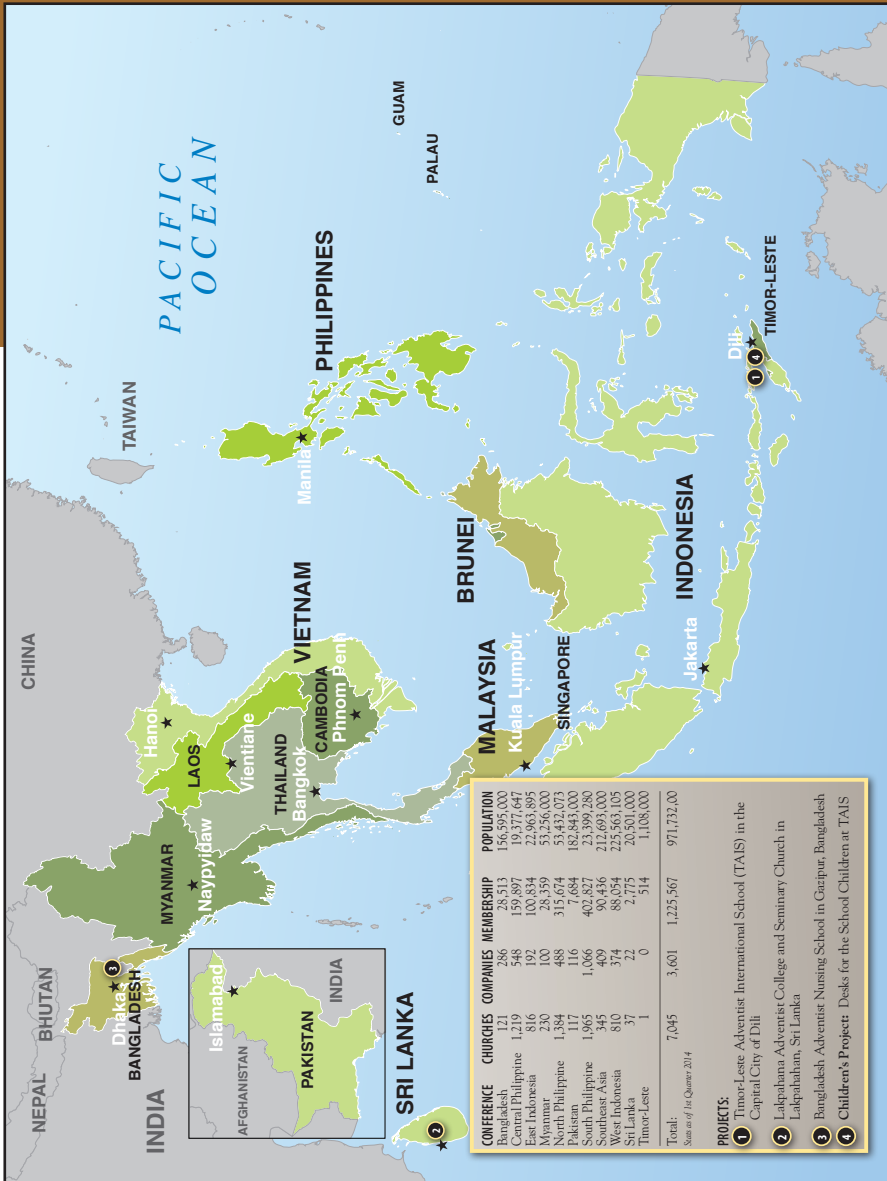


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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

BIBLICAL MISSIONARIES

July • Aug • Sept 2015

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide

July | Aug | Sept 2015

BIBLICAL MISSIONARIES



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The Great Commission

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (*Matt. 28:18–20, NKJV*).

How much plainer could it be? Here is Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, the Jesus whom they worshiped (*vs. 17*), giving His people, in even the earliest days of the church, their calling and mission: make disciples in every nation of the world. Period.

It’s not hard, either, to see the link between these words, spoken to the eleven in Galilee, and the words spoken to John on the island of Patmos years later: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV; see also vs. 8–12*).

One could say that the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 are the Great Commission contextualized for the last days of earth’s history.

No question: God has told His church, His people, to reach out and spread the gospel to the entire world. It’s what we have been called to do. Spreading the truth about Jesus and what He has done for us (*John 3:16*), what He is doing now for us (*Rom.*

8:34), and what He will do for us in the future (*1 Thess. 4:16*) is, truly, our mission.

The word *mission* itself means “a sending or being sent to perform a service.” That is, people go away in order to do something. In the case of the Great Commission, what they do is to spread the gospel to the world.

This quarter we will look at mission first and foremost as God’s means for communicating the gospel to those who don’t know it. Mission is a core part of God’s sovereign activity in the process of redeeming humanity. Thus, we will study how God’s eternal purpose has been accomplished in the lives of individuals in the Bible whom He has used to be missionaries to the lost.

In the end, the Christian mission is God’s mission, not ours. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. And it is accomplished by the will of God.

In the end, the Christian mission is God’s mission, not ours. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. And it is accomplished by the will of God.

To better understand God’s mission commitment and involvement, this quarter’s lessons are based on the following model of salvation history:

1. God created men and women and gave them free will.
2. The first man and woman abused their free will by disobeying God, and they had to leave Paradise.
3. God could not use force to bring them back to Paradise.
4. God sent His Son on a mission to die in their place and reconcile them to Him.
5. God’s mission is to make the offer of salvation known to all people and, thus, open the way for them to have Redemption.

At its most basic level, mission is letting the whole world know about Jesus and about what He has done for each of us and about what He promises to do for us, now and for eternity. In short, we who know about those promises have been called to tell others about them, as well.

Børge Schantz, PhD (Fuller), was a professor at Loma Linda University. He and his wife, Iris, served for 14 years as missionaries in Africa and the Middle East. He passed away in December 2014. Co-contributor Steven Wayne Thompson, before retiring, was president (1984–1990) at Newbold College in England, and then dean of theology faculty and a lecturer at Avondale College, Australia (1991–2008).



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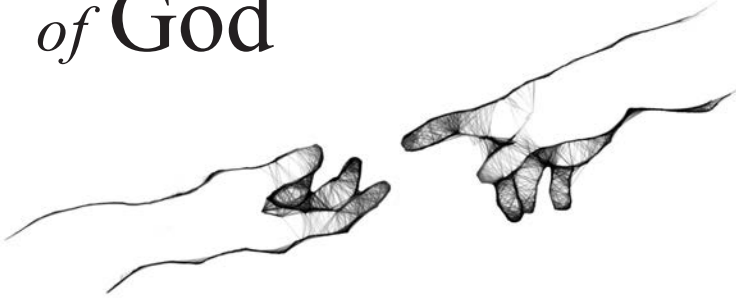


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The Missionary Nature of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 1 John 2:16; John 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 5:13, 14.*

Memory Text: “‘See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples’ ” (*Isaiah 55:4, NIV*).

Our world is a mess, and as humans we are the big reason it is such a mess. And that's because we are sinners, fallen creatures whose nature, at the core, is evil. However much we like to think of ourselves as advancing, as improving, the history of the past century isn't too encouraging. And here we are, not even a quarter of the way into this century, and things don't look that bright from here, either. If the past is a precursor to the future, all we can expect, to quote a former British politician, is “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”

All is not lost, though. On the contrary, Jesus Christ has died for our sins, and through His death we have the promise of salvation, of restoration, of all things being made new. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (*Rev. 21:1, NKJV*).

We have not been left alone, abandoned in the infinite expanse of a cold and apparently uncaring cosmos to fend for ourselves. We could never do it; the forces arrayed against us are so much greater than we are. That's why God had the plan of salvation in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.

God Created Man and Woman

One of the perennial questions humans have asked is, Where do I come from? In the first two chapters of the Bible (in fact, all through the Bible), we have been given the answer to what many would consider the most important question a person can ask. After all, only by knowing where we came from are we off to a good start in knowing who we are, why we exist, how we are to live, and where we are ultimately going.

Skim through Genesis 1 and 2 but focus especially on Genesis 1:26–28. What great differences appear in the creation of humanity as opposed to everything else seen in the texts? What is it about humans that stands out from other parts of this creation?

1. Man and woman were created last of all the creatures. They had the whole visible Creation in front of them to study and care for.

2. God’s mode for creating man and woman differed from that of the other creatures. Up to this point, the divine command had been, “Let there be” (light, firmament, water, fish and birds, animals, etc.). Now the command was turned into consultation: “Let us make man . . .” The Three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—consulted about it. Though these two chapters deal with the creation of the earth and the creatures on it, there’s no question that the main focus is on the creation of humanity itself.

3. Man and woman were created in God’s image and likeness, something not said about anything else that was created at that time. Though the text doesn’t say what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God, it must mean that humans in some way reflect the character of their Creator. Because humans have a moral capacity not seen in other creatures (butterflies might be beautiful, but they don’t struggle with questions of right and wrong), to be made in the likeness and image of God surely means that to some degree humans must reflect His moral character.

4. Man and woman were to have dominion, to represent God on earth, and rule over the rest of Creation. This calling entails responsibility.

Humans are introduced in the Bible in the first chapter, but not in isolation. We exist, but in relationship to God. What does this tell us about how central God should be to our lives and why we are not really “complete” without Him? See also Acts 17:28.

Free Will

Embedded in the Creation account is the warning God gave about not eating from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (*Gen. 2:9*). So, right from the start, we can see the moral element granted humanity, something not seen in any of the other living creatures. As we said yesterday, the capacity for moral judgment is one way that humans reveal the image and likeness of God.

What does Genesis 2:15–17 say about the reality of free will in humanity?

God could have created humans so that they automatically do His will. That is the way the other created things, such as light, sun, moon, and stars, were made. They obey God without any element of choice. They fulfill the will of God automatically through the natural laws that guide their actions.

But the creation of man and woman was special. God created them for Himself. God wanted them to make their own choices, to choose to worship Him voluntarily without being forced to. Otherwise, they could not love Him, because love, to be true love, must be freely given.

Because of its divine origin, human free will is protected and respected by God. The Creator does not interfere with the deepest, persistent choices of men and women. Wrong choices have consequences, sometimes very terrible ones, too, but it is against the character of our Sovereign Lord to force compliance or obedience.

The principle of human free will has three important implications:

For religion: an omnipotent God does not unilaterally direct individual will and choices.

For ethics: individuals will be held morally accountable for their actions.

For science: the actions of body and brain are not wholly determined by cause and effect. Physical laws are involved in our actions, but free will means that we do have a choice regarding our actions, especially moral ones.

What are some of the free moral choices you have to make in the next few hours, days, or weeks? How can you be sure you are using this sacred gift in the right way? Think through the consequences of the wrong use of it.

The Fall

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:6, 7, NIV).

Eating a little fruit was not a sinful act in itself. However, we have to consider the circumstances in which it was carried out. Adam and Eve were agents with a free will, made by God in His image. This included the freedom—but also the duty—to comply with God’s expressed will. They ate the fruit, not out of any stern necessity but rather by choice. It was an act of Adam’s and Eve’s own free will in defiance of God’s clear and specific instructions.

Likewise, we must choose for ourselves whether or not to follow God and whether to cherish or to defy the Word of God. God will not force anyone to believe His Word. He will never force us to obey Him, and He can’t force us to love Him. God allows each of us to choose for ourselves which path we will follow. But, in the end, we must be prepared to live with the consequences of our choices.

By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve, in effect, told God that He was not the perfect ruler. His sovereignty was challenged. They proved disobedient, and as a result, they brought sin and death to the human race.

“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:23, 24, NIV).

Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise. It was a necessary yet merciful consequence. The Lord would not allow rebellious humanity access to the tree of life. With loving care, He kept Adam and Eve away from the fruit that would make them immortal and thus perpetuate the terrible condition into which sin had brought them. (Imagine what eternal life would be like in a world filled with such pain and suffering and evil as ours is!) Adam and Eve were driven out from the lovely Garden to work the less friendly ground outside (vs. 23, 24).

In the context of today’s study, read 1 John 2:16. How were the elements that were warned about in this text seen in the Fall? In what ways do we have to deal with these same temptations in our lives, as well?

God's Initiative to Save Us

The Bible shows that after the Fall of our first parents, it was God who came looking for them, not vice versa. On the contrary, the man and woman tried to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord. What a powerful metaphor for so much of the fallen human race: they flee the One who comes looking for them, the only One who could save them. Adam and Eve did it in Eden, and unless surrendered to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, people are still doing the same thing today.

Fortunately, God did not cast aside our first parents, nor does He cast us aside either. From the time that God first called out, “ ‘Where are you?’ ” to Adam and Eve in Eden (*Gen. 3:9, NKJV*), until today, He is still calling us.

“In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.” —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

Of course, the greatest revelation of God's missionary activity can be seen in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus. Though Jesus came to this earth to do many things—to destroy Satan, to reveal the true character of the Father, to prove Satan's accusations wrong, to show that God's law can be kept—the crucial reason was to die on the cross in the place of humanity, in order to save us from the ultimate result of sin, which is eternal death.

What do each of these texts teach us about the death of Jesus?

John 3:14, 15 _____

Isa. 53:4–6 _____

2 Cor. 5:21 _____

God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). That is what it took in order for us to be made “the righteousness of God in Him” (*NKJV*). This idea has been called the “great exchange,” Jesus taking on our sins and suffering as a sinner so that we, though sinners, can be counted as righteous before God as Jesus Himself.

Metaphors of Mission

Mission is God's initiative to save lost humanity. God's saving mission is motivated by His love for each one of us. There is no deeper reason for it. God sent Christ on a mission to bring salvation for the whole world. John's Gospel alone contains more than forty declarations of the cosmic dimension of Jesus' mission. (See, for example, *John 3:17, 12:47*.) As Christ was sent by the Father to save the world, He in turn sends His disciples with the words "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (*John 20:21, NIV*).

Read Matthew 5:13, 14. What are the two metaphors used for mission in these texts, and what do they stand for?

The metaphors of salt and light express core functions of Christian influence on humanity. While salt operates internally, joining the mass with which it comes in contact, light operates externally, illuminating all that it reaches. The term "earth" in the salt metaphor refers to men and women with whom Christians are expected to mix, while the phrase "light of the world" refers to a world of people in darkness and in need of illumination.

The children of Israel were encouraged to live up to the moral principles and health rules that God had given them. They were to be a light, illuminating and attracting—you are "a light for the Gentiles" (*Isa. 49:6, NIV*). Their collective existence in a state of health, prosperity, and loyalty to God's Sabbath and other commandments would proclaim to the surrounding nations God's mighty acts of Creation and Redemption. The nations, observing their prosperity, would approach them and learn to be taught of the Lord. (That was the idea anyway.)

When Christ came, He also talked about salt, another way to witness. By their influence in the world, Christians are to curb the world's corruption. Unbelievers are often kept from evil deeds because of a moral consciousness traceable to Christian influence. Christians not only have a good influence on the corrupted world by virtue of their presence in it, they also mingle with people in order to share the Christian message of salvation.

How good of a witness are you and your church to the surrounding world? Is the light dimming? Is the salt losing its punch? If so, how can you learn that revival and reformation begin with you, personally?

Further Study: We have dealt with some aspects of the missionary nature of God. Mission is an enterprise of the triune God. Mission is predominantly related to Jesus Christ, whose Incarnation is central to Christian faith and mission. By His life and death, Jesus has paved the way for the salvation of all the human race. We, as His followers, His missionaries, have to let people know the good news of just what Jesus has done for them.

“The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth. Not all are called to personal labor in foreign fields, but all can do something by their prayers and their gifts to aid the missionary work.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 29.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think more about the question of origins. Why do origins matter? How does a proper understanding of our origins help us to better understand who we are and what the purpose of our existence really is?
- 2 How does the following quote help us to understand the existence of free will, love, and evil in our world? “Thus, if God wants to create loving creatures (in imitation of his perfect love), God has to create free beings who can cause suffering and evil in the world by their choices. The dynamics of love and freedom require that God allow us the latitude to grow in love through our human freedom. God’s only alternative to allowing free beings to choose unloving acts is to completely refrain from creating loving creatures.”—Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, Kindle Edition (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), p. 233.
- 3 The death of Jesus was a single act that occurred in a small nation amid the vast Roman Empire almost two thousand years ago. Yet, this act is of eternal significance for every human being. What responsibility rests on us, who know about this act and what it means, to tell those who don’t know about it? How else will they learn of it if those who know about it don’t tell them?

The Gun Would Not Fire: Part 1

by MAX DE LOS REYES, THE PHILIPPINES

Fernando Lopez grew up in a town 60 miles south of Manila. Like many in the Philippines, Fernando's family didn't have much money. And like many young boys, Fernando quit school to help his parents by selling small items and running errands.

Fernando was active in his church, which helped to ease the boredom he often felt. More than anything, Fernando longed for an education so he could serve God better, but he knew that, humanly speaking, this wasn't possible.

Then one day, Fernando heard about the 1000 Missionary Movement, a program to train volunteer missionaries who serve God for one year in the Philippines or in one of several countries. Excited, Fernando asked his parents' permission to join. With their blessing, he applied and was accepted.

The training Fernando received helped to fill his desire for education and prepared him to serve God somewhere in the Philippines. When the training phase ended, he eagerly awaited his assignment to a territory but had mixed emotions when he learned that he was assigned to work in an area some four hundred miles from his home.

Fernando arrived in his new field and began seeking out those who were interested in learning more about God. Soon he was giving several Bible studies a week. Some of the people taking Bible studies lived in a small settlement in the mountains, a four-hour ride by bicycle from where he stayed.

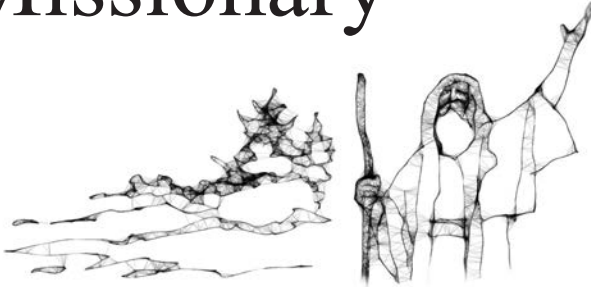
Despite the hardships, Fernando became so involved in his work that he often spent most of his small monthly stipend to buy materials to build a Seventh-day Adventist church, leaving him without money to buy food. This tested his faith and prepared him for even greater tests that would come. But throughout his experience, his faith in God did not waver.

One of Fernando's converts was Julie Taguinod. She and her sister, Essie, had studied the Bible with Fernando and then attended his evangelistic meetings. Julie and her sister had been baptized recently in spite of the objections of Julie's husband, Lem.

Fernando knew of Lem's objections to his wife's interest in religion. Lem had forbidden Julie to attend church and had threatened to harm her if she continued going. But Julie had stood firm and continued to attend church. Fernando appreciated her sincere desire to honor Christ. And Lem began to ignore Julie's church attendance. Perhaps he realized that his objections would not stop his wife from following Christ.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Abraham: The First Missionary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 12:1–3; 14:8–24; Gal. 3:6; Heb. 11:8–19; Gen. 12:6, 7; 18:18, 19.*

Memory Text: “So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’ ” (*Galatians 3:6–8, NIV*).

It's no coincidence that three of the world's major faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.” That's because all three, in one way or another, trace their roots back to this great man of God.

Though Abraham is admired as the defining example of faithfulness, this week's lesson will examine this faithfulness from a different angle. That is, we want to view him as a missionary, as someone called by the Lord to go to another land and witness to the people about the true God, the Creator and Redeemer.

God gave Abraham, and his family after him (*see Gal. 3:29*), a three-fold purpose: (1) to be recipients and guardians of the divine truth of God's kingdom that had been lost in the earlier history of humankind; (2) to be the channel through which the Redeemer would enter history; and (3) to be, as God's faithful servants, a light to the nations, a light to those who needed to know the Lord.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 11.

The Call of Abraham

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ ” (*Gen. 12:1–3, NIV*).

Abram—whose name meant “the father is exalted” and whose name was changed to Abraham, “the father of multitudes”—grew up in Ur, in what is now Iraq. God called him to separate himself from his familiar social and spiritual context and migrate to an unfamiliar country, where God conducted a 100-year spiritual makeover, turning him into the “father of the faithful.” In the midst of personal and family struggles, Abraham became a prototype missionary to several people groups and a respected leader who witnessed to his faith in God.

Read through Genesis 12:1–3. What principles can you find here that could apply to any of us in our own particular situation; that is, what did Abraham experience that we might experience in our own way, as well? See also *Heb. 11:8–10*.

The patriarch was called to leave his past behind him, to step out in faith, to believe what seemed unbelievable, to do what God had called him to do. And as a result of his faithfulness, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

Many of us are tested, as was Abraham. Of course, we might not hear the voice of God speaking directly to us, but He calls us by the teachings of His Word and the events of His providence. We may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor; we might have to leave congenial and profitable associations and separate from family; indeed, we might have to enter upon what appears only to be a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. But if called, how can we refuse?

In Genesis, the Hebrew reads literally, “And God said to Abram, ‘Go for yourself from your land.’ ” He was told to go “for himself”; that is, for his own sake. How should we understand what that means, and how can we apply it to ourselves?

Abraham's Testimony to the Kings

Lot was a relative of Abraham and accompanied him on some of his travels. His choice of the well-watered Jordan valley brought him into the company of the wicked men in Sodom (*Gen. 13:1–13*). He was then rescued first by Abraham (*Gen. 14:11–16*) and later by two angels (*Genesis 19*).

When Abraham heard that his relative, Lot, was in trouble, he decided to help him. In rescuing Lot, Abraham headed a military force of more than three hundred men of his own household. Numerous kings were involved in the battle for Sodom, and Abraham came out the victor.

Read Genesis 14:8–24. What did Abraham's actions say about his character and, hence, about his faith and his God?

To the kings he conquered, Abraham revealed the power of God. Even during this rescue mission, the “father of the faithful” did not lose his divine call to be a blessing to the nations.

“The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed. His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes. On his return, the king of Sodom came out with his retinue to honor the conqueror. He bade him take the goods, begging only that the prisoners should be restored. By the usage of war, the spoils belonged to the conquerors; but Abraham had undertaken this expedition with no purpose of gain, and he refused to take advantage of the unfortunate, only stipulating that his confederates should receive the portion to which they were entitled.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135.

Think about your dealings with others. What kind of witness do they present to others about your faith?

Exemplar of Faith

Though hardly perfect, Abraham was a man of God, and time and again in the Bible, even in the New Testament, he is used as an example of faithfulness and of what it means to be saved by faith (*see Gen. 15:6, Gal. 3:6*).

Read Hebrews 11:8–19. What does it tell us about Abraham and his faith that is so important for anyone who wants to be a missionary for God in whatever capacity possible?

The Lord wanted to use Abraham, but the first thing He had to do was get him to leave his past behind. The lesson there should be obvious to any of us, especially those of us who have pasts not in harmony with the will and law of God, which actually includes us all.

Amazing, too, was the fact that though Abraham left, “he did not know where he was going” (*Heb. 11:8, NIV*). Though most missionaries know where they are going, at least in a geographical sense, in another sense when we take a giant leap of faith and give our hearts totally to God, we really don’t know (at least in the short run) where we will wind up (though in the long run, we have absolute assurance). If we did know, it wouldn’t require that much faith; hence, not knowing is prerequisite for truly being able to live by faith.

Another crucial point here is that Abraham was looking to “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (*vs. 10, NIV*). Abraham kept the big picture in mind; he knew that whatever he faced here, whatever toils and struggles, it would all be worth it in the end.

He knew, too, that he wasn’t just a stranger in “the promised land” but that he was one of many “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (*vs. 13, NKJV*). This world, and our lives in it, as precious as they appear to us now (it’s all we have now), are not the whole story, not by a long shot.

And, of course, the greatest example of faith in the Old Testament was what Abraham was willing to do to his son on Mount Moriah at the command of God.

In what ways have you experienced what it means to step out in faith? What hardships have you faced? What joys have you experienced? Knowing what you know now, what might you have done differently?

Abraham, the Wanderer

A study of Abraham's life reveals that his faith included difficult struggles against doubt and disbelief in God's power. Abraham's ancestors were idolaters (*Josh. 24:2*), and perhaps this background explains why he did not always have full confidence in God's power. Twice he showed cowardice and told Sarah to tell only a half-truth (*Gen. 12:11–13, 20:2*). He laughed (*Gen. 17:17*) when he was told that he would have a son with Sarah. Despite his faults, Abraham was still used by the Lord because Abraham wanted to be used by Him; and thus, the Lord was able to mold His character.

One means God used to shape Abraham into a reformer and missionary was his many wanderings. Traveling is an education in itself. It opens a person to new ideas and the possibilities of change. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem were an important and required part of Israelite worship. The changes the pilgrims experienced when they had to walk distances, sleep in other places, eat different food, encounter another climate, and meet other people enhanced their faith by their vulnerability. Their worship, with its sacrifices and offerings, sacred dances, and reciting of psalms, helped God's people to confirm their identity and traditions.

In his travels from his birthplace in Ur to his burial site in Hebron, Abraham visited at least 15 different geographical areas. Most of the important reforming and missionary episodes in his life are connected with his journeys.

What were some of the spiritual lessons that Abraham experienced in the following places?

Moreh at Shechem (*Gen. 12:6, 7*) _____

Hebron (*Gen. 13:18–14:20*) _____

Mamre (*Gen. 18:1, 20–33*) _____

Mount Moriah (*Gen. 22:1–14*) _____

Abraham: A Missionary in His Own House

“ ‘Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him’ ” (*Gen. 18:18, 19, NIV*). What important lessons about faithfulness and serving God do we find in these texts?

“God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. And that which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life. His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 187.

Missionary activities will be more successful when they are backed by a family life that is in harmony with the designs of God. Bible history and church history tell us that most early Christian churches were house- and family-based. One of the reasons Abraham was chosen was that God saw his ability to direct his children and his household in the way of the Lord. God’s purpose in the family equals His purpose in missions; namely, “to do what is right and just” (*Prov. 21:3, NIV*).

What examples of Abraham’s family can you find that showed that they were faithful to the Lord? See, for example, *Heb. 11:11, 20*.

Of course, in the Bible we can also find examples of godly men whose families didn’t follow the way of the Lord. Nevertheless, the point of the texts for today is clear: Abraham’s faith and example were strong enough that those of his household learned to “keep the way of the LORD” (*Gen. 18:19*).

To “keep the way of the LORD.” What does that phrase mean to you? How are we to “keep the way of the LORD”?

Further Study: “God called Abraham, and prospered and honored him; and the patriarch’s fidelity was a light to the people in all the countries of his sojourn. Abraham did not shut himself away from the people around him. He maintained friendly relations with the kings of the surrounding nations, by some of whom he was treated with great respect; and his integrity and unselfishness, his valor and benevolence, were representing the character of God. In Mesopotamia, in Canaan, in Egypt, and even to the inhabitants of Sodom, the God of heaven was revealed through His representative.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 368.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 For thousands of years, the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah has thrilled and challenged the faithful while evoking scorn and ridicule among those who have seen it as an act of cruelty and barbarity. Read the story over again in Genesis 22. What great lessons can we take from it? What does it teach us about the Cross and the terrible cost of sin? What does it teach us about what taking a leap of faith entails? Why is the story so troubling to many?
- 2 Read Genesis 12:11–13, 20:2, two accounts where Abraham, a man of God, showed a lack of faith. What can we take away from these stories?
- 3 One of the most famous texts in the Bible is Genesis 15:6. What does it say? In what context is it given? How is this text used in the New Testament (see *Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23*)? What does it teach us about faith, works, and salvation?
- 4 Who were some of the great religious leaders whose family members didn’t follow in “the way of the LORD”? What can we learn from their stories that can encourage anyone who struggles with helping family members to be faithful?

The Gun Would Not Fire: Part 2

by MAX DE LOS REYES, THE PHILIPPINES

Lem was a soldier, and his assignments often took him away from home. When he was home, he spent much time and money drinking with his friends.

One day Lem's buddies began teasing him about his wife's interest in religion. "What's the matter, Lem?" one man challenged. "Couldn't you keep your wife from joining that church?" As the teasing grew more intense, Lem became agitated.

"You're wrong!" he finally blustered. "I'll prove to you that I can control my wife!" With those words Lem swaggered out of the bar and headed home.

That afternoon Fernando had been visiting homes of people interested in studying the Bible. He wasn't far from Julie's home when he decided to stop by to make sure Julie still planned on his visit the next day. As he neared her house, Fernando was startled by a loud blast that sounded like a gunshot. At first, he was not concerned about it, but when another shot rang out, he looked around to see who was shooting.

Just then he saw Julie running toward him. "Run! Get away!" she shouted. "Lem's trying to kill you!"

Fernando took cover behind a large tree. He knew that Lem was an expert marksman, and if the man wanted to hit Fernando, he could do so easily. Julie ran back toward the house where she found her husband angrily yanking at his gun, trying to remove a bullet that had lodged in the barrel. As Julie saw what he was doing, she grew bold. "Lem, you know that God jammed your gun so you couldn't hurt Fernando!"

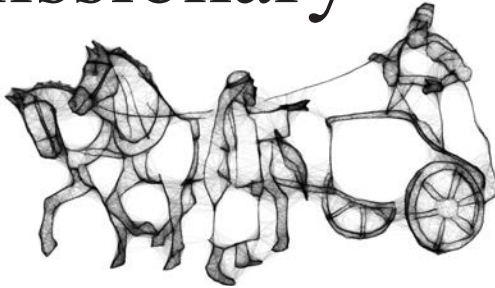
None of Lem's efforts could unjam the gun. Surprised by this unexpected turn of events, Lem put the gun down and listened to Julie explain how God had worked to save His messenger from death. When he cooled down and sobered up, Lem admitted that his wife was right. Fernando had done nothing to harm him.

Lem no longer objects when his wife and children attend church services. He has accepted Fernando's friendship and has agreed to Bible studies. He has told his drinking buddies that he is glad his family attends church, and they have stopped teasing him.

Those who witnessed the events of that day agree that God truly worked a miracle to save Fernando's life. But the change in Lem's heart is no less of a miracle.

MAX DE LOS REYES was the executive secretary of the Mountain Provinces Mission in the Philippines when this was written.

The Unlikely Missionary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Kings 5; Mark 1:40–45; 2 Kings 2:1–15; John 15:5; Rom. 6:1, 4–11.*

Memory Text: “And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian” (*Luke 4:27, NIV*).

The books of Kings, covering the history of the kingdoms of Israel from about 970 to 560 B.C., record exciting and dramatic events and far-reaching political upheavals touching God's people. Woven in these accounts are the stories of Elijah and Elisha, daring prophets of God whose adventures have gripped the imaginations of children and adults in every age.

Also interesting are the similarities between the ministry of Elisha and the ministry of Jesus. In the ministries of both, dead persons were raised, lepers cleansed, and hungry people fed from small amounts of food.

This week's lesson deals with one of these miracles: the healing of Naaman, a wealthy, powerful, and very proud idolater who, in his great need, came to experience the power of the living God and first did so through the witness of a very unlikely missionary.

Among the many spiritual truths that can be found in this account, we can get a model for cross-cultural witnessing in the midst of international tension and rivalry. We can see, too, in this story a model for how the plan of salvation works.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.

He Had It All . . . But

“Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy” (2 Kings 5:1, NIV).

This verse contains no fewer than four descriptions or titles that put Naaman in the top echelon of Syrian, or Aramean, society. He exerted major influence on the king of Aram, was held in high esteem, and was the king’s right-hand man in religious, as well as military, matters (*vs. 18*). He was also extremely wealthy (*vs. 5*).

However, verse 1 has a major “but.” All Naaman’s power, honor, and bravery paled in light of the most feared disease in those days, leprosy. And that is exactly what this poor man had, the major “but” that cast a dark shadow over all else he had achieved. This ailment, however, brought him into contact with God’s prophet, and through that contact he became a believer in the true God.

Read Mark 1:40–45, Luke 8:41–56, and Mark 2:1–12. **Despite the obvious fact that Jesus did miraculous healings here, what is the common denominator in these accounts? What is it that brought all these people to Jesus?**

Personal life disruptions, tragedies, and transitions can make people more open to spiritual truth and set them on a search for God. Physical, psychological, political, or other disasters can open people up to the reality of the Divine. Personal loss, national catastrophes, and wars are major motivators that cause people to seek a power greater than themselves. The church has long been aware that increased soul-winning results tend to come in areas in which people are struck by personal or societal suffering.

On one level Naaman appeared to have it all; on another he was a broken man without much hope. In what ways are we all like that, having good things and bad things in our lives? How can we learn to allow both to keep us connected to the Lord?

An Unlikely Witness

Read 2 Kings 5:1–7. What is going on here? Why would the Syrians even have listened to what a captive slave girl had to say? What might be the hidden implications of what transpired?

The Bible gives us no real details of how this young girl acted in the home, but it's clear that there was something about her that caught the family's attention. Think about it: on the word of a captive female child in his household, a wealthy and powerful military leader goes to his king, tells him what she said, and then gets permission from the king to go. Even more so, he loads up on gifts to bring to the prophet. Obviously, more was going on than what is explicitly stated in the texts. Nevertheless, God's agent to plant the knowledge of Him in the ruling circles of Syria was an unnamed little Hebrew slave girl, cruelly snatched from her home by a Syrian raiding party. Instead of dwelling on the cruelty and meaninglessness of that act, and of her life of servitude, she shared her unshaken faith in the life-changing power of God, who was working through Elisha in Samaria (*vs.* 3). Thus, like Daniel and his companions in Babylon, she was able to turn her own adversity into a way to glorify God; and thus, God turned her captivity into an opportunity to share her faith. According to Ellen G. White, "The conduct of the captive maid, the way that she bore herself in that heathen home, is a strong witness to the power of early home training."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 245.

What should this tell us about how our faith, lifestyle, and actions can draw others to us and to the truths with which we have been entrusted?

What's fascinating, too, in this story is the reaction of the king of Israel upon getting the letter. *Am I God? Can I heal leprosy?* His words reveal just how dreaded the disease was and why only a miracle could bring about a cure. For whatever reason, the letter implied the expectation that the king was to bring the cure. He knew that he couldn't do that, and so he thought it was all a trick to instigate trouble.

Elisha, the Prophet

The ministry of the prophet Elisha in the ninth century B.C. comes to us in a series of 18 episodes, extending over more than fifty years. His ministry was conducted mostly as the head of the school of the prophets and was largely public. It included displays of signs and wonders at both the personal as well as the national level. Elisha was a prophet whose counsel and help were sought by both kings and commoners.

Read 2 Kings 2:1–15. What does this tell us about the calling and ministry of Elisha?

No question that Elisha was called of God; he had some incredible experiences that must have confirmed his calling in his own mind. More important, his request for a “double portion” of the Spirit showed his awareness that for him to do what he was called to do, he would need divine power, because in and of himself he would be helpless. Thus, even back then, this man of God understood what Jesus said many centuries later: “ ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing’ ” (*John 15:5, NKJV*). It’s a lesson that we all need to recognize, no matter our position in the Lord’s work.

Obviously, as we can see from the story of Elisha’s calling, this power had, indeed, been granted to him. Thus, Elisha revealed that he had a healthy and honest understanding of his own role and calling when he declared to the king: let Naaman “know that there is a prophet in Israel!” (*2 Kings 5:8*).

Also interesting must have been the scene when this military commander and his retinue showed up in all their glory at the door of Elisha’s house, probably something relatively small and modest in contrast to the luxury that Naaman enjoyed. Elisha, however, didn’t seem all that intimidated by Naaman and his troops. In fact, Elisha did not so much as step outside to meet his powerful caller; instead, he sent a messenger, who gave the military commander a command! The only reward for Naaman’s long trip from Damascus was the blunt directive to go to the Jordan and bathe! But it was accompanied by a promise: “ ‘you will be cleansed’ ” (*vs. 10, NIV*).

No doubt the pride of this important man was hurt. Perhaps, though, that was the point.

The Healing of Naaman

Read 2 Kings 5:11–14. What does this account teach us about Naaman and some of the lessons he had to learn? What can we take from this for ourselves, as well?

Had the prophet Elisha personally met his prominent guest Naaman and employed exorcising gestures accompanied by magic formulas and other rituals so common in pagan religions, Naaman might not have hesitated. But two aspects of his reception insulted him. Not only did the prophet not personally come out of his house to meet Naaman, but he also directed him to the Jordan River as the place to get his leprosy cured.

From the viewpoint of protocol, Naaman was right. Elisha should have left his house to greet him. And the rivers in Damascus were undoubtedly better, since their water was clearer than the muddy Jordan's. However, through Elisha, God directed Naaman to the Jordan, a river in Israel. The entire cure process was designed to demonstrate, first, that there was a prophet of the true God in Israel and, second, that God rewarded believing compliance.

Naaman's retinue convinced him to submit to his new, divine "commander" and at least give it a try. Their argument, that if the suggested cure had been complicated he would have endured it, persuaded him. It must have been hard for Naaman to swallow his pride at having to listen to a slave girl, a foreign prophet who showed him little deference, and, finally, to his own servants. He was, though, desperate for healing.

"So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (*2 Kings 5:14, NIV*).

The initial requirements for Naaman's healing were belief and compliance. As soon as he conquered his pride and complied with God's expressed will by bathing seven times in the muddy Jordan, he was cured.

Read Romans 6:4–11. How does the story of Naaman reflect some of the principles taught in these verses? In what ways have you experienced the reality of a "new life" in Christ?

A New Believer

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant” (*2 Kings 5:15, NIV*). **In what way do these words help to reveal the experience of salvation?** See *Rev. 14:12; 1 John 5:2, 3; Rom. 6:1*.

It would have been easy for Naaman to return directly from Jordan to Damascus after his healing. However, as a gesture of thankfulness, he and his attendants returned to the prophet's place. This time they met Elisha in person. The confession that the God of Israel is sovereign in the world is the main theme of the Bible. These words coming from a pagan constitute one of the high points in Old Testament revelation. Naaman's conversion made clear that his new experience had to be tied to the God of Israel. The prophet was an Israelite, the river was the most important in Israel, and the number seven was a clear connection to the God of creation.

What we see with Naaman is an example of how true faith works: Naaman received something that he could never have earned on his own. The fact that Elisha refused the gifts (*2 Kings 5:16*) was a way of showing how salvation cannot be earned or bought but is wholly of God's grace. At the same time, however, Naaman's willingness to give something to Elisha for what he had done for him shows the response of faith, a response out of gratefulness for what had been given him. Elisha refused the gift. Here he followed the example of Abraham when he helped the pagan kings but refused rewards with the words that no one should be able to say, "I made Abram rich" (*Gen. 14:23, NIV*). Elisha knew that acceptance of a gift would have spoiled the lesson Naaman should learn. The healing was the work of God and an act of sheer grace.

"Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have then the genuine ring in our faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love."—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 16.

If others were to look at your life, what would they see in it that reveals your love for God because of what He has done for you in Christ?

Further Study: “Centuries after Naaman returned to his Syrian home, healed in body and converted in spirit, his wonderful faith was referred to and commended by the Saviour as an object lesson for all who claim to serve God. ‘Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet,’ the Saviour declared; ‘and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.’ Luke 4:27. God passed over the many lepers in Israel because their unbelief closed the door of good to them. A heathen nobleman who had been true to his convictions of right, and who felt his need of help, was in the sight of God more worthy of His blessing than were the afflicted in Israel, who had slighted and despised their God-given privileges. God works for those who appreciate His favors and respond to the light given them from heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 252, 253.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Throughout the years a great deal of discussion has ensued over what happened after the healing of Naaman. In 2 Kings 5:17–19, Naaman makes a powerful confession of faith, saying, “‘for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD’ ” (vs. 17, *NKJV*). However, right after, he says, “‘when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing’ ” (vs. 18, *NKJV*). What are the implications of Elisha’s reply? To what extent do Christian missionaries have to exercise patience and understanding to new converts, especially when they come to us from a different religious and cultural background?
- 2 How rapidly should enculturation of new converts take place? “The widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian had lived up to all the light they had; hence they were accounted more righteous than God’s chosen people who had backslidden from Him and had sacrificed principle to convenience and worldly honor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 416.
- 3 Healing and salvation came to Naaman by a faith revealed in his actions. Discuss more the whole question of the relationship between faith and works. Why is it so important to understand the crucial yet distinct roles both have in the Christian life and witness?

Twice Victorious: Part 1

by NATHALIE VILLANUEVA, THE PHILIPPINES

The Villanueva family were devoted to one another and their church. Napoleon, the father, often worked far from home. After a while, a pattern of late-night socializing with his coworkers began. He began spending more of his paycheck and sending less money home.

Lolita, his wife, grew concerned by the dwindling checks. She knew something was wrong and went to see her husband. When she learned of his activities, she tried to reason with him but eventually returned home, frustrated and hurt.

Lolita found a Bible and began searching for guidance and comfort. One day as she read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the fourth commandment stopped her. “Remember the Sabbath day,” it said. She had always worshiped on Sunday. But if Christ died on Friday, rested on the Sabbath, and rose from the dead on the first day, Sunday, then the Sabbath day must be Saturday. She decided that if God had commanded His children to keep the Sabbath day holy, she would obey.

But she found it more difficult to obey the first and second commandments. All of her life she had prayed while looking at statues of Christ or a saint. “Lord,” she prayed, “I’m sorry, but I can’t pray without looking at You or a saint! Please give me a sign that I mustn’t pray to these statues!”

During the night, Lolita was awakened by the sound of breaking glass, followed by beating wings. She thought that the neighbor’s rooster had gotten into her house. But before she could investigate, she fell back to sleep. When she got up the next morning, she found that her statues of saints had fallen and were lying on the floor, broken into hundreds of tiny pieces. She fell to her knees and asked God to forgive her for doubting His Word.

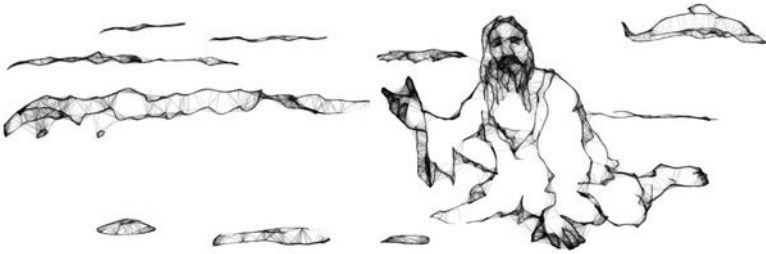
Lolita found a Seventh-day Adventist church and decided to attend. She arrived long before services began and knelt quietly to pray. During the worship service, she wept. Afterward, a woman invited her to study the Bible. Lolita eagerly accepted and was soon ready for baptism.

Lolita invited her five teenage children to attend church, but they were busy. However, when they were free, they went with her. They found the church service to be long but enjoyed the afternoon youth meetings.

Napoleon returned home and learned that Lolita planned to be baptized. Out of respect, the family members attended church with her when they could. One by one, Lolita’s husband and children were baptized.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

The Jonah Saga



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jonah 1–4, 2 Kings 14:25, Isa. 56:7, Isa. 44:8, Matt. 12:40, Rev. 14:6–12.*

Memory Text: “‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’ ” (*Acts 10:34, 35, NIV*).

The Jonah saga is the account of a Hebrew prophet working well beyond his comfort zone. Alive during the reign of Jeroboam II, about 750 B.C. (*2 Kings 14:25*), Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet whom we know of who was directly called to be a missionary in another country. The truth that the Creator of all races did not intend to limit salvation to only His chosen people is stated repeatedly in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah and the Psalms, even though popular Israelite theology at the time of Jonah did not accept that the Gentiles were also in God's plan to partake in salvation. Even in New Testament times, it was a hard lesson for the Jewish believers to learn.

In the four chapters of Jonah, we read an honest record of Jonah's reluctant pioneering experience as a foreign missionary, both the positive and the negative. Here a person's inner, and very human, reaction to the call of God is preserved, along with a powerful appeal for the need of foreign missionaries. A few guidelines for foreign missionaries and cross-cultural witnesses emerge from the book, which also points to solutions for some of the issues and problems modern missionaries face.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 25.

The Flawed Prophet

Read 2 Kings 14:25. What does this tell us about Jonah? In what kind of light is he presented?

Outside the book of Jonah, the prophet is mentioned in one other Old Testament passage, 2 Kings 14:25. Here he is honored as a prophet that predicted Israel's recapture of territory taken by Syria.

Jonah was born in Gath Hepher (Hebrew for "winepress at the water hole"), a town in Zebulun in northern Israel, only a few miles from Nazareth. This means that both Jesus and Jonah were Galilean prophets, separated by about 750 years.

Read Jonah 1:1–3, 9, 12; 2:1–9; 3:3–10. What kind of picture do these verses present about him, both the good and the bad?

Jonah emerges from his book a strange mixture of strength and weakness: self-willed and rebellious but also teachable and obedient. He was loyal to God, courageous, and a believer in prayer, but he was also narrow-minded, selfish, and vindictive. While Jonah was described as a servant of the Lord in 2 Kings 14:25, he cut a somewhat sad and tragic figure in the book bearing his name. It is a mark of the integrity and reliability of the Bible that he was described in such a candid manner. The natural, human tendency of a writer would be to obscure and hide less-acceptable aspects of biblical heroes. But under the Spirit's inspiration, the Bible's authors present the valiant along with the petty in the lives of people to illustrate the truth that, no matter how weak and unpleasant these characters may be, God is able to work through them if they are willing.

What other Bible characters did God use despite their personal-ity flaws? What hope can we draw for ourselves from the fact that God uses flawed and damaged people to work for Him in reaching out to others?

An Early Missionary

“Go to Nineveh!” was God’s command to Jonah. In the Old Testament, the usual appeal to the nations was “come to Zion.” God’s original plan was for Israel to live their religion, making the nation so attractive that other nations would come to them for guidance (*Isa. 56:7*).

Jonah, as a forerunner of the disciples in the New Testament (*Matt. 28:18–20*), is told to go to Nineveh, which to him seemed an unclean center of idolatry, brutality, and totalitarianism. Jonah made detailed preparations to go west by sea, even though God had directed him to go east by land. Jonah, the unwilling prophet, fled in the opposite direction.

Read Jonah 1:3–17. What lessons can we gain from this amazing narrative?

God’s response to Jonah’s flight came in the form of a mighty storm. The winds obey their Creator, even though His prophet does not (*Mark 4:41*). Jonah slept during the storm while the Gentile crew prayed (*Jon. 1:5*). In honesty, Jonah confessed that he caused the calamity, and he testified to the true God and Creator. Notice that his reply, “I am Hebrew,” referred both to his religion and his nationality. In their alarm at the ferocity of the storm, the Gentile sailors tried to save themselves and the passengers, and they showed compassion to Jonah in their reluctance to comply with his instructions to throw him overboard. (The reluctant prophet was willing to sacrifice himself to save others.) When they finally complied, the storm ceased and the sea calmed (*vs. 15*). The amazed sailors became Jonah’s first converts to his God, who could work through Jonah, even while he fled from his call.

The salvation of Jonah was just as miraculous as was the salvation of the ship. God prepared “a great fish.” The original Hebrew doesn’t specify what sort of fish saved Jonah by swallowing him. Jonah in the belly of the fish is certainly the best-known episode of the story; however, it should not overshadow the book’s deeper message that God loves, cares for, and wills the salvation of all people.

In the end, there is only one God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth (see *Isa. 44:8; 45:5, 6*). Anything else anyone worships is idolatry and error. Any other “god” they pray to is imaginary, a lie. Why is this truth so important for us to realize and internalize for ourselves, especially in the context of mission?

In the Belly of the Big Fish

The three-day experience in the belly of the big fish became a type of the death and resurrection of Christ (*Jon. 1:17–2:10, Matt. 12:40*). God provided and directed the great fish. Although there are accounts of people who survived at sea after having been swallowed by a whale, we must remember that God provided this particular great fish, as well as the miraculous power that sustained His servant while inside. In the end, this was a miraculous event that could have occurred only through the supernatural intervention of the Lord, who is revealed all through the Bible as a personal God who does indeed intervene miraculously in people's lives.

There is evidence that the phrase “three days and three nights” was an ancient figure of speech expressing the time needed for the imaginary journey to Sheol, the Hebrew name for the realm of the dead. Considering what happened to him, Jonah indeed should have been as good as dead.

In the belly of the fish, Jonah began to pray. The captain had directed Jonah in vain to “call on your God” (*Jon. 1:6, NKJV*). Now in a hopeless situation, Jonah starts to pray, and seriously too. It took something this desperate to get him finally to do what he should have been doing all along. A summary of Jonah's prayer has been preserved in the form of a psalm of thanksgiving. Such psalms typically include five parts: (1) introduction; (2) description of the distress; (3) cry to God for help; (4) report of God's action; and (5) promise to keep any vow made and to testify to God's saving action. That is, Lord, if You get me out of this, I promise to do such and such. Who hasn't prayed like that before? The question is, Did you do what you covenanted to do?

Read Matthew 12:40. How does Jesus take the story of Jonah and apply it to Himself? See also *John 2:19–22*.

The chapter ends with the words: “And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (*Jon. 2:10, NIV*). God's command to the great fish brought about what well-meaning sailors failed to do for Jonah. In the same way, Christ commanded the disciples after His resurrection to go into all the world; so, Jonah after his underwater adventure went to the Gentiles and became the most successful missionary in the Old Testament. Jonah's rescue witnessed to God's saving mercy. His seaweed-draped arrival on the beach testified to God's determination to save even sinful Assyrians from death.

The Nineveh Generation

Read Jonah 3. What great message is found here in the context of outreach and evangelism?

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” (*Jon. 3:1, 2, NIV*). Two verbs are important in the text. First, this is the second time God says “Go!” God does not give up. He grants failing humans a second chance. Here again we have the New Testament mission concept, which is the idea of going to the nations, as opposed to expecting the nations to come to you.

The other important verb is “proclaim.” Proclamation has always been important in the Bible. It is still the most effective way of spreading the gospel message. God emphasized to Jonah that it should be “the message I give you.” That is, the message we proclaim must be God’s, not our own, nor even a tweaked, modified, or bowdlerized version of it.

God’s message is generally threat and promise, judgment and gospel. His stark proclamation was, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (*vs. 4, NIV*). That was the judgment. Yet, there was also the promise of hope, of deliverance, of salvation (there must have been because the people heeded the message and were saved).

Even with the “everlasting gospel” at the heart of it, Revelation 14:6–12 also warns about judgment. Gospel and judgment go hand-in-hand: the gospel offers us God’s way to avoid the condemnation that judgment would justly bring upon us all.

No preaching of the gospel is fully effective unless judgment is taught. “Political correctness,” which leads to a watering down of these stark elements and downplaying differences between religions or even between different Christian traditions, is risky. Though in mission we need to adapt our presentation for the people we are trying to reach (contextualization), we must never do so at the expense of the message God has given us to proclaim.

In Jonah 3:5–10, what happens? The Ninevites believed, acted on their beliefs, exercised their faith, and were saved.

God has given us some wonderful promises, and stern warnings, too. What should this story teach us about the conditionality of these promises and warnings?

Jonah's Lament

Jonah 4:1–11 confirms that the greatest obstacle for God to get His prophet involved in world mission was not distance, wind, sailors, fish, or Ninevites. It was the prophet himself. Ninevite faith contrasted with Jonah's unbelief and vindictive spirit. Jonah is the only person in the Scriptures who accuses God of being gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger, abounding in love and who relents from sending calamity. One would think most people would view these aspects of God with thankfulness.

“When Jonah learned of God’s purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God’s amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city. The compassion shown by God toward the repentant Ninevites ‘displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.’”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271.

Read Jonah 4:10, 11. What do these texts teach us about the character of God in contrast to sinful human nature? Why should we be glad that God, not fellow human beings, is our ultimate Judge?

Jonah showed his anger twice in chapter 4. He was angry because God changed His mind and saved Nineveh's more than one hundred twenty thousand inhabitants. He was also angry because the vine withered. In his selfishness, the prophet needed to get his priorities right.

God instructed Jonah to recognize human brotherhood based on the fatherhood of God. The prophet should accept his common humanity with these “foreigners,” although they were wayward. Were not 120,000 people more important than a vine?

Read again the Lord's rebuke to Jonah. In what ways might the Lord be able to say something similar to us? That is, how often do we find ourselves more concerned about our own personal issues, many of which at times can really be trivial, than about the lost souls whom Christ shed His blood to save?

Further Study: “The book of Jonah is so significant for understanding the biblical basis of mission, because it treats God’s mandate to His people regarding the Gentile peoples, and thus serves as the preparatory step to the missionary mandate of the New Testament. But it is also important for catching a glimpse of the deep resistance this mandate encounters from the very servant Yahweh has chosen to discharge His worldwide work.”—Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), p. 96.

Discussion Questions:

- ① “In the history of Nineveh there is a lesson which you should study carefully. . . . You must know your duty to your fellow beings who are ignorant and defiled and who need your help.”—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, p. 80. What is our duty to these fellow beings?
- ② Assyria was one of the superpowers dominating the ancient near east from about 885 to 625 B.C. Israel and Judah suffered repeatedly under her harsh rule. Israel’s King Jehu was forced to pay tribute to the dominating Assyrian ruler, Shalmaneser III. Israel finally fell to Assyrian forces about 722 B.C. No wonder Jonah was reluctant to go to Nineveh, one of the four chief cities of Assyria, and the center for the worship of Ishtar, goddess of love and war. God had called him to visit the very spiritual heartland of enemy territory to call on the warlike Assyrians to repent. What lessons are here for us in regard to missions?
- ③ How can the remnant church avoid the assumption that the counsels and blessings of the Lord in areas such as the Sabbath, health, and education are given to them for their own benefit, rather than for the benefit of the nations? *Read Rev. 3:17, 18.*
- ④ In what ways do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 reflect the message that Jonah had for the Ninevites?
- ⑤ Some people automatically reject the Jonah story, particularly the part where he is in the belly of the fish. What presuppositions would cause them to reject it out of hand? What presuppositions do you need in order to believe it?

Twice Victorious: Part 2

by NATHALIE VILLANUEVA, THE PHILIPPINES

The Villanueva teens joined the Pathfinder Club. The club scheduled an outing to Mount Kitanglad, hoping to earn their mountain-climbing honor.

James Villanueva, age 16, eagerly started the six-hour trek up the mountain with his sisters and 12 other Pathfinders. Soon he found himself ahead of the rest and decided to wait. He stepped onto a tree stump to get a better view. Three wires, similar to those strung along the trail to guide hikers, hung above his head. He reached up and grabbed one of the wires for balance. When he saw his sisters approaching, he turned to swing off the stump. As his feet left the stump, a sharp pain flashed through his hand, and he crumpled to the ground.

James's sister Nathalie saw him jump. She saw sparks shoot out from his hands as he fell. She raced to where he lay motionless. His hands and arms were so badly burned that the skin was peeling off.

"Someone get help!" she shouted. "James has been electrocuted!"

While someone ran for help, Nathalie tore off her shirt to make bandages for her brother's arms. Toto, the Pathfinder leader, raced up the slippery mountainside. He ordered some Pathfinders to climb to the summit and call for help. He sent the rest down the mountain to summon an ambulance. Toto and Nathalie remained with James, praying that help would come in time.

Three men who worked at the summit came upon the accident scene. The men rigged a stretcher from a sleeping bag and began the dangerous trip down the slippery mountain.

It was dark when they reached the bottom. They placed James in an oxcart to carry him the two and a half miles to where an ambulance waited. James arrived at the hospital 12 hours after the accident.

Nathalie stayed with her brother until their parents arrived. The doctors wanted permission to amputate both of James's arms, but Nathalie refused. When her parents arrived, she begged them to have James airlifted to Manila, where he could receive better care. But even there the doctors said that James's left arm was too badly burned to be saved.

Through the difficult months following the accident, the family could have lost their faith. But prayers and the support of the church members helped to hold their faith intact.

James is already planning to go back and conquer Mount Kitanglad to earn his mountain-climbing honor. But in the eyes of many, he has already conquered more than a mountain.

NATHALIE VILLANUEVA is the daughter of Napoleon and Lolita Villanueva and the sister of James.

Exiles *as* Missionaries



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Daniel 1–12; Isa. 39:5–7; Dan. 2:44; Matt. 24:14, 15; Genesis 41.*

Memory Text: “‘He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.’ ” (*Daniel 7:14, NIV*).

As a people of prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists believe in the soon coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will end this world as we know it and ultimately will usher in God’s everlasting kingdom, depicted in the book of Daniel this way: “ ‘The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him’ ” (*Dan. 7:27, NKJV*). This kingdom is the culmination of our faith; it is what the book of Hebrews (*Heb. 11:16*) called the “better country,” the one that all God’s people through the ages have trusted will come, the one whose “builder and maker is God” (*vs. 10*).

But the book of Daniel is also a kind of handbook for missionary activity. From it we can draw lessons on how the Lord was able to use some of His people to witness to those who were steeped in spiritual and theological ignorance. Through their faithfulness and diligence and unwavering faith, these believers revealed the reality of the living God to those who knew only false ones and gave these pagans a chance at a place in this everlasting kingdom, as well.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.

The Exile

Read Isaiah 39:5–7 and Daniel 1:1, 2. How are these verses related?

Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was force-marched from a defeated Jerusalem into the Babylonian capital. The book of Daniel gives glimpses of his life in the courts of Babylon and Persia. After three years of “education” in Babylon, Daniel was employed as a civil servant and royal advisor. Through the power of God, he rose above normal captive status to become a highly placed missionary to two superpowers.

The book of Daniel is more than a treasure of prophetic literature. The reader encounters some of the challenges facing Hebrews living in an alien culture that provided no apparent support for their loyalty to the God of Israel and, at times, was openly hostile. It also paints a beautiful picture of men who learned to live out their commitment to truth in the absence of the temple, the priesthood, and sacrifices.

Read Daniel 1:8–13, 5:12, 6:4, 9:3–19. What do these texts tell us about Daniel’s character that made him the great missionary he was?

“Every institution that bears the name of Seventh-day Adventist is to be to the world as was Joseph in Egypt, and as were Daniel and his fellows in Babylon. In the providence of God these men were taken captive, that they might carry to heathen nations the knowledge of the true God. They were to be representatives of God in our world. They were to make no compromise with the idolatrous nations with which they were brought in contact, but were to stand loyal to their faith, bearing as a special honor the name of worshipers of the God who created the heavens and the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 153.

Think how easy it would have been for Daniel to have compromised, especially given his circumstances. What does his example teach us about how lame our excuses for compromise often really are?

Witnesses (*Daniel 2–5*)

In Daniel 2, Daniel had an opportunity, born out of necessity, to witness to the power of the true God, as opposed to the false ones of Babylon. After singing a hymn of praise with his Jewish compatriots and thanking God for answering their prayers (*Dan. 2:20–23*), he interpreted the king’s dream and testified to God’s greatness and dominion over all earthly kingdoms.

What does the king say that shows he learned something about the true God? *See Dan. 2:47.*

In Daniel 2, Daniel didn’t have a choice: either give the king what he wanted or face death. In contrast, in chapter 3, his three friends could have spared themselves the fiery furnace if they simply had obeyed the king’s command. Instead, by their faithful witness, they were able to testify to the power of the true God.

“How did Nebuchadnezzar know that the form of the fourth was like the Son of God? He had heard of the Son of God from the Hebrew captives that were in his kingdom. They had brought the knowledge of the living God who ruleth all things.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 3, 1892.

In Daniel 4, what confession did King Nebuchadnezzar again make regarding the true God, all thanks to the witness of Daniel? *See Dan. 4:37.*

In Daniel 5, we have Daniel’s last appearance at the Babylonian court, where he is called upon to explain the extraordinary writing upon the wall of Belshazzar’s palace, foretelling the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire at the hands of the Medes and Persians. Though no doubt Belshazzar had been impressed by what Daniel did, it was too late: the king’s fate was all but sealed. The sad thing is that according to the Bible (*see Dan. 5:17–23*), Belshazzar had had opportunity to learn truth and to be humbled by it. As we know, he didn’t take advantage of those opportunities.

How important that we look at our own lives and ask ourselves, What kind of witness does my life represent to the world? What does your answer tell you?

Daniel in Persia

“And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” (*Dan. 6:20*). The king called Daniel the “servant of the living God.” What is implied in those words?

In Daniel 6, with the change of empire and king, Daniel still kept his position and was even promoted, becoming one of three presidents to whom 120 satraps were to report. King Darius even considered appointing him vizier over his whole kingdom, arousing the antipathy of the other presidents and satraps. They induced the king to make an empire-wide decree that really was aimed at Daniel alone. He was thrown into a den of lions, but God dramatically intervened in a situation that even the sympathetic king could not reverse. Daniel’s deliverance so pleased the king that he issued an empire-wide royal decree exalting the God of Daniel.

“Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: ‘May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions’ ” (*Dan. 6:25–27, NIV*).

Read Daniel 6. What in the chapter indicates that Daniel had already been a great witness to the king? Also, what in the king’s decree indicates that he knew more about Daniel’s God than he could have learned merely from the dramatic rescue? What does this tell us about Daniel’s witness to him?

Daniel and God's Eternal Kingdom

Daniel was not merely an interpreter of other men's dreams, significant as that was in this context. In Daniel 7–12, he had his own visions, which revealed the future of great world superpowers. Daniel's visions especially emphasized that, despite earthly rulers and their plans and machinations, God retains final control of nations. In the end, He and His final kingdom will triumph, and that triumph will be complete (*see Dan. 2:44*).

Read Daniel 7:13, 14. What is being described in these texts, and how does it relate to the idea of Christians taking the gospel to the world?

Whatever else those verses are talking about, the central issue is the establishment of God's eternal kingdom, which doesn't come until after the return of Jesus. And what factor did Jesus Himself say was important in regard to His return?

“ ‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’ ” (*Matt. 24:14–16, NIV*).

Jesus' prophecies of the end of the world in Matthew 24 are linked to Daniel's prophecies. The “abomination of desolation” predicted by Daniel (*Dan. 11:31, 12:11*) was further explained and applied by Jesus to His own day and beyond. The point is that Jesus closely linked the book of Daniel to the end times, which, of course, isn't surprising, because Daniel in many places does indeed point to the end times (*Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35; 12:4, 13*). And, according to Jesus, the end doesn't come until “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*).

The gospel is to be preached unto “all the world,” and only then will Jesus return. And we are the ones called to preach it. Some then argue that Jesus can't return until we do our work. How are we to understand our role in the timing of Jesus' return? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

More Exiles as Missionaries

Daniel was an Israelite in involuntary banishment from Israel, as were Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Nehemiah in Babylon, and Esther in Persia. Their lives reveal that it is possible to live faithfully to God in spiritually and culturally unsupportive environments. With God’s direction, it was even possible to attain prominent administrative positions in these alien settings. Each lived a creative and rich life, skillfully negotiating complex religious, social, political, and economic dynamics far different from those of their home culture. They not only were loyal members of exiled Hebrew communities—they were also in their own ways effective missionaries for the God of Israel.

Witness while in exile included both passive presence and active proclamation.

Esther	Daniel
1. Did not identify as a Hebrew until called to reveal it.	1. Identified as a Hebrew.
2. Kept her religion to herself until called to reveal it.	2. Made known his religious convictions.
3. God protected her and her family.	3. God protected him and his friends.
4. Witnessed in high places to save her life along with her people’s.	4. Witnessed in high places to save his life along with other people’s.
5. Helped establish religious freedom and the right to self-defense of a religious minority.	5. Indirectly influenced King Cyrus to allow exiled Hebrews to rebuild the Jerusalem temple.

Read through Genesis 41. In what ways was Joseph able to witness to the Egyptians? How does his story parallel that of Daniel and his companions in Babylon?

In what situations in which you find yourself can you witness for your faith? Are you giving a passive or active witness, or both? What are things you can either say or do that would make a more powerful impression on others about the goodness and love of our God?

Further Study: “Multitudes will be called to a wider ministry. The whole world is opening to the gospel. . . . From every quarter of this world of ours comes the cry of sin-stricken hearts for a knowledge of the God of love. . . . It rests with us who have received the knowledge, with our children to whom we may impart it, to answer their cry. To every household and every school, to every parent, teacher, and child upon whom has shone the light of the gospel, comes at this crisis the question put to Esther the queen at that momentous crisis in Israel’s history, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 484, 485.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the prophecies in the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 2, 7, and 8. In what ways are these such a powerful testimony, not only to the prophetic reliability of the Bible but to God’s foreknowledge? For instance, notice how, between Daniel 2, 7, and 8, three of the four main kingdoms are named for us. How should this help us learn to trust in the Word of God and His promises to us?
- 2 In these accounts in the book of Daniel and some of the other stories (such as that of Joseph), there were some miracles that, of course, greatly added to the credibility of their witness to the pagans around them. At the same time, too, what aspects of their character lend even more credibility to their witness? That is, in what way can character and faithfulness, even more than signs and wonders, be a more powerful witness to others about the reality of God and what He can do in our lives?
- 3 As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Matthew 24:14 says that the gospel needs to go to the ends of the earth, and then the end will come. Does this mean that Jesus will not come back until we do the work that He has called us to do? Discuss.

A Gift From the River: Part 1

by DONESHOR TRIPURA, BANGLADESH

Doneshor was glad to be home, watching his father's water buffalo. He had been away at school and had just completed his high school graduation exams. The day grew hotter, and Doneshor decided to go for a swim in the nearby river while the buffalo grazed nearby. He waded into the cool water, looking for a place that was deep enough to swim. It was the dry season, and the river was much shallower than usual.

Doneshor stood in the waist-deep water and looked upstream. He saw something floating in the water. It wasn't unusual to find debris in the river, so he wasn't sure why this object caught his eye. He waited as it bobbed closer to him, then he reached down and picked it out of the water. It was a Bible. He had never seen a Bible before, but instinctively he knew that this was a holy Book. He waded ashore and carefully laid the wet book in the sun to dry. As a few pages dried, he then turned to other wet pages and allowed the sun's hot rays to dry them.

Doneshor came from a religious family. Every day they worshiped their gods, laying gifts of rice and incense on the altar in their home. Doneshor's parents had taught him to respect all things holy, and that included the Book he had found in the river.

The Book wasn't yet dry when evening came, so Doneshor took it home. The next morning he carried it back to the field and laid it open in the sun. After three days, the Bible was dry enough for him to read it. Curious, he turned to the first pages and began reading, "In the beginning God created . . ."

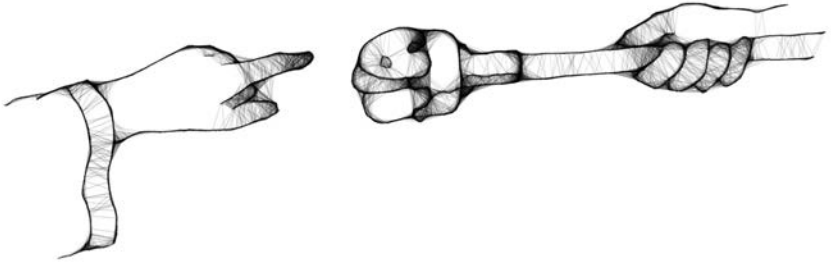
Doneshor was fascinated by the account of Creation and the first man and woman. He remembered reading about the first humans in the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy book. An idea struck him, and he began comparing the Bhagavad Gita with the Bible.

One day he read the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples and contrasted that to his own prayers. *I have done nothing but ask and ask, wanting something for myself or my family. Now I understand that Christians pray for others.*

As Doneshor continued reading, he discovered a God who searches out and invites people to accept His gift of salvation. This God is patient, and He loves to forgive. Doneshor thought how his entire life had been an effort to earn the favor of the gods by giving them expensive gifts and by making long and tiring pilgrimages to appease them.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Esther *and* Mordecai



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Esther 1–10, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, John 4:1–26, Acts 17:26, Matt. 22:21, Rom. 1:18–20.*

Memory Text: “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this’ ” (*Esther 4:14, NIV*).

Esther was used to carry out a high-level, specialized mission within the dangerous political heart of the Persian Empire. Her mission involved her in a series of striking contrasts. An orphaned female member of a despised ethnic and religious minority living in the superpower of her day, she became the wife of the Persian king. This was no rags-to-riches fairy tale. Rather, she was lifted from obscurity and groomed to carry out a highly specialized mission. It required of her the risky strategy of working, at first, undercover. Later she had to make a perilous full disclosure of her ethnicity and faith.

Supported by her cousin and foster father, Mordecai, her daring witness at the intrigue-ridden court of the Persian Empire saved her people, reversed their low social status, and made them empire-wide objects of admiration.

No doubt as a result of her faithfulness, knowledge of the true God became more widespread among their heathen captors. Though not your “typical” missionary story, the narrative of Esther and Mordecai does present some interesting principles that can help us to understand what it means to witness in peculiar circumstances.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.

Esther in Persia

Read Esther 1:2–20. What is happening here? What things about this story are hard to understand from our perspective today? (As you read, remember that a lot of details are not presented.)

The weeklong banquet that King Ahasuerus gave for his nobles and officials seems extravagant, even for someone at the pinnacle of political power, far beyond what most Christians would find acceptable. The unrestricted consumption of alcohol (*Esther 1:7, 8*) was unusual, because drinking during ancient formal feasts was usually controlled by convention and ritual. In this case, it clouded the king's judgment to the point that he ordered his wife Vashti to provide entertainment for the king's drunken, all-male gathering. This was far beneath her dignity as a married woman and as a member of the royal family. Whatever her response, she faced the dilemma of losing status, and her courageous choice to retain self-esteem in the face of an autocratic ruler's base desires prepares the reader to understand the power for good that a principled woman could exert, even in a male-dominated royal court.

Meanwhile, though, we have to deal with the actions of Esther. Esther 2:3 gives the impression that these women were not volunteers. The king issued the decree, and so Esther had to come. Had she refused, who knows the outcome?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. In what ways can we apply the principles seen in these verses to what happened with Esther? Or do they apply?

So far in the story the real heroine is Vashti, who then disappears from history. Her modesty and stand on principle opened the way for Esther. In some cases, though, principled stands don't always lead to an obvious good. In the end, why should we take principled stands, even if we don't know the outcome of our actions?

Esther in the Court of the King

Read Esther 2:10, 20. What situations might arise where nationality or religious affiliation should be hidden, at least for a time?

Read John 4:1–26, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. Why did Jesus tell her so openly that He was the Messiah, when among His own people He was not so forthcoming? How does this account, perhaps, help us to understand Mordecai's words to Esther?

Twice Mordecai charged Esther not to reveal her nationality and family background. This has troubled some commentators, who have questioned the need for this attitude of concealment, especially during a time that the Jewish people were not threatened. Could she not have been a witness about her God to these pagans if she were open about who she was and the God she worshiped? Or could it be argued that to be a Jew lacked credibility at the Persian court and that revealing her ethnicity would have hindered her in gaining access to the king when she pleaded for her people? It appears that even before the threat occurred, Mordecai had warned Esther not to reveal her identity. The fact is that the Bible does not tell us the reason for his words to her; however, as we can see with the example of Jesus, one does not have to reveal everything at once in every circumstance. Prudence is a virtue.

Meanwhile, why did Jesus speak so openly to the woman at the well and not to His own people?

“Christ was far more reserved when He spoke to them. That which had been withheld from the Jews, and which the disciples were afterward enjoined to keep secret, was revealed to her. Jesus saw that she would make use of her knowledge in bringing others to share His grace.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 190.

Have you ever been in a situation in which you deemed it prudent not to say too much about your faith or your beliefs? What reasons did you have? As you look back now, what might you have done differently, if anything?

“For Such a Time as This”

In Esther 3:1–5, the plot of the story starts to unfold. Mordecai, a Jew—following the commandment against idolatry—refused to bow down to Haman, a mere man. Furious, Haman sought a way to avenge himself for what he took as a slight. Mordecai, by his actions, in a way was witnessing among these pagans about the true God.

What excuse did Haman use to try to rid the empire of the Jews? What does this tell us about how easy it is to let cultural differences blind us to the humanity of all people? *Esther 3:8–13; see also Acts 17:26.*

As Haman’s plot was made known, Mordecai expressed his grief visibly, using one of the Jewish religious rituals mentioned in the book of Esther: “He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, . . . wailing loudly and bitterly” (*Esther 4:1, NIV*). In the meantime, Esther prepared to go before the king. She would become a Jewish breaker of royal Persian law by heroically entering the king’s presence without invitation, as part of a plan to foil Haman’s plot. The king admitted her and accepted her invitation to dine. Esther now takes the lead in the drama faced by the Jewish exiles across all of Persia. In this story, Esther showed self-denial and heroism (*vs. 16*), tact (*Esther 5:8*), and courage (*Esther 7:6*).

“Through Esther the queen[,] the Lord accomplished a mighty deliverance for His people. At a time when it seemed that no power could save them, Esther and the women associated with her, by fasting and prayer and prompt action, met the issue, and brought salvation to their people.

“A study of women’s work in connection with the cause of God in Old Testament times will teach us lessons that will enable us to meet emergencies in the work today. We may not be brought into such a critical and prominent place as were the people of God in the time of Esther; but often converted women can act an important part in more humble positions.”—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140.

Read Esther 4:14, Mordecai’s famous words to Esther: “Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” ” (*NKJV*). In what ways might the principle behind these words apply to you, right now?

Mordecai and Haman

According to Esther 5–8, how was Esther able to save her people?

The accounts of Esther’s two banquets bring the story to its crisis point. They also record the great reversal of the plotted ethnic extermination. On the way, the story exposes the difference between true honor and self-honor, and it records the punishment of the villain. These court intrigues had far-reaching consequences. They give us a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes workings of an absolute monarch and his court. Esther and Mordecai used their positions, their knowledge of the culture in which they lived, and their faith in God’s covenant promises to His people to bring about their deliverance.

Meanwhile, despite his quiet life of service, Mordecai let his faith be known, if through no other means than his refusal to bow down before Haman. People noticed, and they admonished him, but he refused to compromise his faith (*Esther 3:3–5*). This, surely, was a witness to others.

Read Esther 6:1–3. What does this tell us about Mordecai? What lessons could we draw about how God’s people can function, even witness, in foreign lands?

Though Mordecai obviously was following the Lord, nevertheless he showed allegiance, and loyalty, to the sovereign of the nation in which he lived. While refusing to bow before a man, he still was a good citizen, in that he exposed the plot against the king. Though we can’t read too much into the fact that he hadn’t been honored for this act, very possibly he did it and then just went on his way, not expecting any reward. In time, though, as the story shows, his good deed was more than rewarded. His example here is perhaps best expressed by these words: “ ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ ” (*Matt. 22:21, NKJV*).

When Some Gentiles Became Jews

Read Esther 8. Focus specifically on verse 17. How can we understand this in terms of outreach and witness?

No question, the book of Esther is not a “typical” story about outreach and witness. And yet, we can see something like this scenario happening here toward the end. As a result of the king’s edict on behalf of the Jews, “many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them” (*Esther 8:17, NIV*). Some commentators argue that theirs could not have been a true conversion experience, since fear and anxiety should have no place in proselytizing. While that’s true, who knows in the longer run how these people, whatever their motives at first, might have responded to the working of the Holy Spirit, especially after seeing great differences between their beliefs and the belief and worship of the one true God?

Read Romans 1:18–20. How might the concepts taught here come into play with these people, especially in the context of this story?

In the original decrees against the Jews, not only were the Jews to be killed, but the ones to do it were told that they should “plunder their possessions” (*Esther 3:13, NKJV*). Also, when the Jews were given permission to kill their enemies, they, too, were told that they could “plunder” the possessions of their enemies (*Esther 8:11, NKJV*). However, three times in the book of Esther (*9:10, 15, 16, NKJV*) it specifically says that the Jews did not “lay a hand on the plunder” (*NKJV*). Though the texts don’t say why, the fact that it was mentioned three times shows the emphasis that was placed on this act. Most likely they refrained because they wanted it known that they were acting out of self-defense and not greed.

How can we make sure that in our outreach and witness to others we don’t do anything that would cause people to question our motives? Why is this so important?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 598–606.

“The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews. Today the enemies of the true church see in the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment a Mordecai at the gate. The reverence of God’s people for His law is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 605.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** What parallel can we draw between the edict that was brought against the Jews and what will happen in the last days as the issue of the “mark of the beast” comes to the forefront?
- 2** Both ancient Jews and Christians disputed the right of the book of Esther to have a place in the Old Testament canon. It did not appear in the Old Testament used by the community that produced the Dead Sea scrolls, nor in the Old Testament of the churches of ancient Turkey and Syria. The name of God does not appear in the book of Esther, while there are about 190 references to the heathen king. There are no references to sacrifice, temple, or worship, although fasting and prayer are mentioned. Finally, the covenant emphasis on forgiveness and mercy is not mentioned. And yet, the Lord saw fit to include it in the canon. Why? What powerful spiritual lesson can we take from it about how God can work in our lives for good, even amid what appear to be very difficult circumstances?
- 3** Dwell more on the idea of times during which missionaries and others doing outreach do not openly talk about their identity and work. What are some valid reasons (if any) for us to do that, especially in the context of mission? Sometimes, for instance, missionaries are very careful not to say who they are, especially in countries that are hostile to Christian witness. If we are impressed not to reveal right away who we are, how can we do it in a way that is not being dishonest or deceitful?

A Gift From the River: Part 2

by DONESHOR TRIPURA, BANGLADESH

Doneshor felt a fervent desire to know the truth. He decided to mark with a red pencil everything he found in the Bible and in the Bhagavad Gita that was good and helpful. Soon he realized that he was marking nearly everything in the Bible. Doneshor decided that one day he would be a Christian, though he had no idea how or when that would happen.

He entered college and had little time to read, but his desire to know God never left him. When he returned home after college, he met an old friend in the marketplace.

“I’ve become a Christian,” his friend told him. Doneshor was thrilled. He told him about finding the Bible in the river and then said, “Tell me how can I become a Christian?”

His friend’s face lit up, and he hugged Doneshor. Then he told him that in a city about thirty miles [forty-five kilometers] away, there was a church where Doneshor could learn how to become a Christian.

Early Saturday morning, Doneshor boarded a bus to the town where the church was located. He found the house church and went in. Everyone sat with their eyes closed. Doneshor didn’t realize they were praying. He looked at them. *They look like normal people*, he thought. When they opened their eyes, they were surprised to see Doneshor standing near the door. They welcomed him and invited him to join them.

Doneshor attended the church as often as he could, but he couldn’t go every week because the bus fare was expensive. But he felt great joy in what he was learning and began telling his friends about it. Some wanted to visit the church, too, so the little group agreed to take turns going, sharing the expense of the bus fare. Then those who had gone could teach the others what they had learned.

For a year, Doneshor and his friends attended church this way. Then Doneshor told the pastor that he wanted to be baptized. The pastor was happy to arrange the baptism but apologized because the little church had no baptistry. “We’ll have to baptize you in the Chengi River,” the pastor said.

“That’s wonderful!” Doneshor responded. “The same river that brought me the Bible will seal my covenant with God.”

Doneshor and 24 others were baptized in the river where his quest for God had begun. Among those other 24 were seven friends who Doneshor had invited to learn about Christ. They are the first Christians among the Tripura people.


DONESHOR TRIPURA *studied theology at Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College in Bangladesh.*

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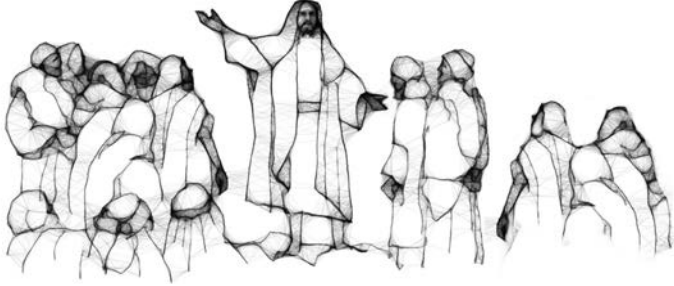
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Jesus: The Master of Missions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Dan. 9:24–27; Isa. 42:1–9; Luke 2:8–14; Matt. 10:5, 6; Acts 1:1–14.

Memory Text: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ ” (John 20:21, NIV).

According to Scripture, a core activity of the Trinity is mission. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in saving humanity. Their Word began at the Fall and continues through until the end. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will then restore this redeemed world to full unity with the divine will.

According to the Gospels, Jesus underwent the radical change into human form necessary for His mission to succeed. In Jesus Christ, the meaning of history comes into focus, the total mission activity of God becomes coherent, and the deepest needs of humans for meaningful existence are fulfilled.

In the New Testament, we are made acquainted with the purposes of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We find here how He outlines the program for mission, and we get glimpses of how Jesus met people from other nations, people of other faiths. In the Word of God, we can see the incredible saving activity of God on behalf of fallen humanity.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 15.

Jesus in the Old Testament

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:8, 9, NKJV).

Besides being great verses about the futility of salvation by works, these verses reveal the eternal nature of salvation; they show that the plan for our redemption had been formulated long, long ago.

So, it is no wonder that all through the Old Testament, Jesus Christ is revealed in one way or another. Especially powerful are the prophecies, which clearly show that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

Read the following Old Testament texts, all applied to Jesus. What do they say about Him and His role as Messiah? *Isa. 61:1, Dan. 9:24–27, Isa. 7:14, 9:6, 42:1–9.*

The prophet Isaiah describes the mission of Jesus with these words: “ ‘Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. . . . I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness’ ” (Isa. 42:1, 6, 7, NIV).

Dwell on the incredible idea that Jesus, the Creator, took upon Himself our humanity and in that humanity lived and died as He did. What great hope does this offer you in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all?

The Desire of Ages

Jesus Christ is Lord of both the church and the world. His coming is a fulfillment of the Old Testament expectations of a saved community that would extend far beyond the Jewish people. The coming of Jesus, especially His suffering and resurrection, ushered in a new age in which the distinction between Jew and Gentile, as far as the gospel is concerned, disappears. Jerusalem would remain the center, at least for a while. However, the point of departure was no longer Herod's temple in Jerusalem, but the Jews converted to Christ; they had become the living temple. These Christian Jews would then be the "remnant" of Israel at that time in the early church, the ones called to bring the gospel to the world.

This announcement of the worldwide, universal mission of Christ as Savior of all nations was repeated at His birth, during His childhood, and at His baptism.

What do the following texts teach about the universal mission of Jesus to the world?

Luke 2:8–14 _____

Luke 2:25–33 _____

Luke 3:3–6 _____

John 1:29 _____

No question, Jesus came as the Savior for all humanity. What does this truth mean for us in the context of mission?

"The missionary spirit needs to be revived in our churches. Every member of the church should study how to help forward the work of God, both in home missions and in foreign countries. Scarcely a thousandth part of the work is being done that ought to be done in missionary fields. God calls upon His workers to annex new territory for Him. There are rich fields of toil waiting for the faithful worker."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 29.

Mission to the Jews

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (*Matt. 15:24, NIV*).

Between His first public appearance and His crucifixion, Jesus focused His ministry almost solely on the Jewish people, particularly in Galilee. The Lord addressed Himself first to Israel. Before the Cross, there are very few messages of good news to the Gentiles. Apparently, Jesus wanted to awaken the Jewish people to their place, purpose, and role in God’s overall mission for lost humanity. Israel was to have the opportunity to be the witness of God’s message to the world.

Read Matthew 10:5, 6. Why would Jesus say here what He did? How do we understand these words in the context of the universal scope of what Christ came to do and in the context of missions as a whole? Contrast this text with *Matt. 28:19*.

When we consider the life and ministry of Jesus, we must observe a clear distinction between His thinking, ideals, principles, and planning on one side and the way He accomplished these purposes on the other. In His day-to-day life and ministry, He identified Himself with Jewish culture, just as the Old Testament predicted of the Messiah. But the impact of His incarnation was universally applicable. Through His death and resurrection, He would bear the sins of the world (*John 1:29*).

We detect here an important biblical principle for establishing mission. The first move is directed to creating a center in order to establish a strong and stable geographical and cultural base: Israel and the Jewish people. When that has been accomplished, mission should next develop outward from the center into ever-widening expanses.

Think about your home church. How well does it model the ideas expressed above—that is, a strong and stable base that eventually is able to reach out to others? How can you avoid the danger, which many churches face, of being self-oriented, worrying about your own needs to the neglect of witness and mission?

Mission to the Gentiles

Although Jesus spent the major part of His time among the Jews, serving them in their cultural context, He made clear in His teaching and ministry that His mission was universal. The gospel should be preached to the nations, with Israel as the initial base. The salvation of the Gentiles is part of God's plan. It was embodied in Jesus' teaching.

How do the following teachings of Jesus indicate mission to non-Jewish people?

Matt. 5:13, 14 _____

Mark 14:9 _____

Luke 14:10–24 _____

Matt. 13:36–43 _____

Despite the fact that Jesus ministered mainly among the Jews, there's no question that from the very start His mission was for the whole world. Right at His baptism, John the Baptist said it clearly: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' " (*John 1:29, NKJV*). The word *world* (Greek *kosmos*) occurs about one hundred times in the Gospels. About half of these refer to the worldwide scope of Jesus as the Redeemer.

In the parable Jesus told in Luke 14:16–24, those invited made all sorts of excuses for not coming. Read those excuses again. On one level, none appeared unreasonable, did they? What important lesson should we take from this for ourselves?

The Great Commission

Jesus spent the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension primarily in preparing the disciples and His church for worldwide evangelism.

The best-known and most quoted resurrection account is Matthew's. However, during this period there were other occasions during which the risen Christ could have given further details on the gospel commission. There were two appearances in Jerusalem, two in Galilee (one by the Sea of Tiberias, one on the hilltop), and the meeting reported in Acts 1:1–14.

There are five structured occasions in the Gospels in which the Great Commission narrative is dealt with from various angles: on a mountain in Galilee (*Matt. 28:16–20*); at a table (*Mark 16:14–16*); in the upper room (*John 20:19–23*); on the beach (*John 21:15–17*); and just as Jesus was taken up into heaven (*Acts 1:6–9*). What key points do all these incidents have in common?

Under the power of the Holy Spirit and obeying the words of Jesus, the apostles quickly spread across the ancient world. Paul preached on the northern shore of the Mediterranean; Philip worked in Samaria. According to early Christian tradition, Matthew traveled to Ethiopia and Thomas to India.

Though starting out small, and with so much opposition, through the grace of the Lord these faithful followers were able to spread the gospel message to the world. Whatever their faults, weaknesses, fears, doubts, and struggles, they accepted the call and worked for the salvation of the world. That is, what they learned about Jesus, what they got from Jesus, they sought to share with others. Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

What have you been given in Christ? How should God's gift to you through Christ influence your attitude toward witness and mission to others?

Further Study: According to Matthew, Jesus foretold that “ ‘this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come’ ” (*Matt. 24:14, NIV*). At the same time, the Scriptures make another point clear: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (*Matt. 24:36*). Note also Jesus’ words: “ ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority’ ” (*Acts 1:7, NIV*).

Thus, while the good news of the gospel has been preached and is being preached as never before, and while we believe that Christ’s coming is soon, we must not get caught up in dates and speculating about dates. “We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed. Jesus has told his disciples to ‘watch,’ but not for a definite time. His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 189.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Despite the clear teaching on not setting dates for Christ’s return, hardly a year goes by before we hear something in the news about some group of Christians setting a date for Christ’s return. Why do you think people insist on doing this, other than as a good fund-raising technique? (After all, if Jesus is coming on June 19 of next year [or fill in any date you want], then what good is your money now?) Why is it bad for the Christian witness in the world when these dates, year after year, are shown to be false?
- ❷ Think of the obstacles the early believers faced in the first few years of mission, especially considering that they were so small in number. What are some of the obstacles we face in mission today? What can we learn from the success of the early church that can help us to do what we have been so clearly called to do?

Faithful Bride: Part 1

by REENA MURMU, BANGLADESH

Shanti was raised in a Christian home in Bangladesh. She was still quite young when her father died. Her mother struggled to feed her family. When Shanti was 13 years old, her mother gave her in marriage to a Hindu man.

According to custom, when Shanti went to live with her husband's family, she was expected to take his religion. But Shanti refused. Her husband's family treated her badly, and everyone worked to separate Shanti from her Christian faith. But Shanti clung to her God.

Shanti was expected to serve her mother-in-law, who treated her as a slave, shouting at her and denouncing her. Because Shanti refused to give up her faith in God, she was considered unclean and not allowed to work with food or utensils in the kitchen. But her mother-in-law made sure there was plenty of other work for the girl to do.

Shanti's husband, Bhudroy, was much older than Shanti and treated her kindly, but he was powerless to help his young bride, for he didn't dare defy his mother's orders.

There was no escape for the young bride because the couple was expected to remain with the family until after the first child was born. Three years after they married, their first daughter, Reena, was born.

Shanti tried to share her faith with her husband whenever she could, and over time he began to believe that Shanti was following the right religion. A Seventh-day Adventist pastor lived in the same village as Shanti. He visited the family and explained the church's beliefs, hoping to make Shanti's life a bit easier. Shanti's mother-in-law refused to listen to the pastor, but her father-in-law listened. The pastor returned to visit the family often, sharing his faith and Bible promises with the family members who were open to hearing them.

As he worked in the village, the pastor found a number of people who were interested in learning about the Bible. The pastor arranged to hold evangelistic meetings. Without Shanti's knowledge, her husband asked the pastor to study the Bible with him. Then he was secretly baptized. Shanti didn't know about her husband's interest until after he was baptized, but she was thrilled.

Shanti's mother-in-law, however, was very unhappy to learn that her son had abandoned his gods to worship his wife's God. She growled under her breath when she saw Shanti and Bhudroy going to church together. She often tried to prevent them from attending church. She would hide some household valuable and demand that the couple find it before they went to church. These searches often made the couple late.

When her pranks no longer worked, Shanti's mother-in-law turned to her other daughter-in-law for help in breaking the spirits of Shanti and Bhudroy. This daughter-in-law was selfish and often bickered and fought. She made life bitter for everyone.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Cross-Cultural Missions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:4–30, Matt. 8:5–13, Mark 5:1–20, Matt. 15:21–28, Luke 17:11–19, John 12:20–32.*

Memory Text: “Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.” (*Matthew 12:18, NKJV*).

How interesting that Jesus spent so much of His earlier years in Galilee, known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (*Matt. 4:15*), no doubt named because of the non-Jewish influence in the province. In this region, in Nazareth, Jesus spent the majority of His years before starting His public ministry. Thanks to its position, Nazareth was near major routes traveled by Roman army units, as well as merchant caravans. As a result, Jesus must have been in contact with non-Jews His whole early life (not to mention the time in Egypt).

After His rejection in Nazareth (*see Luke 4:16–31*), Jesus centered His ministry in the cosmopolitan Galilean city of Capernaum. Contacts with Gentiles and their world significantly impacted His ministry and teaching. Even though He focused on Israel, the wider world was His concern. During the more than three years of His ministry between His baptism and ascension, on at least six occasions Jesus had direct contact with persons from Gentile nations. We will look this week at the Gospel accounts of these contacts.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.

The Samaritan Woman

In the time of Jesus, ancient Israel was divided into three provinces: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Samaria was situated between Galilee and Judea. The Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel, but they also worshiped pagan gods imported from foreign lands. As an initial mission field, Samaria was ideal for the apostles because it was geographically close to Israel.

Read John 4:4–30. What can we learn from this story about how Jesus witnessed to non-Jews? In what ways did Jesus step outside the bounds of tradition in order to reach out to this woman?

The Samaritan woman was alert, well-informed about the history of her people, and asked intelligent questions. She led the conversation with her questions. Jesus, however, responded to her questions and statements with the things that would benefit the woman spiritually. The only point where Jesus changed the conversation was when He told her to bring her husband, knowing that she wasn't married but had been with several men. Of course, asking her to do this opened the way for Him to reach out to her, however uncomfortable she had become. Nevertheless, by doing this, He was able to witness to her in a powerful way.

Also, we shouldn't miss what happened in John 4:27. The disciples were surprised because Jesus was talking with this foreign woman. Jesus transgressed a few Jewish customs: first, asking a Samaritan woman to give Him a drink; second, being alone with her. In Israel, a man could not be seen alone with a woman unless she was a family member. Jesus followed Jewish customs when in Israel. However, in Samaria, He was outside Jewish territory and not bound by Jewish traditions, even though as we have seen elsewhere, Jesus distinguished between human-made traditions and the commands and precepts of God.

How far out of your own “comfort zone” are you willing to go in order to minister to others? How far should you go?

The Roman Army Officer

Read Matthew 8:5–13 (see also Luke 7:1–10). What does this story teach us about how even the largest cultural divides can be breached for the sake of the gospel?

In Capernaum, a Roman officer of centurion rank (commander of 100 men) sought out Jesus. The Jews resented the occupying Roman army, and many Romans hated the Jews. Despite this vast cultural and political divide, we can see the close relationship here between this Roman and the Jews.

In Luke's account, he said that the centurion went to the "elders of the Jews" (Luke 7:3, *NIV*) to ask them to bring Jesus. And, fascinatingly enough, they did just that, asking Jesus to come heal the man's servant. Who were these elders? The text doesn't say, but it seemed to have related to Jesus differently than did some of the other leaders.

Meanwhile, the centurion was obviously a man of faith; his words to Jesus, "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (*Matt. 8:8*), were an incredible testimony to his belief in Jesus. The centurion "did not wait to see whether the Jews themselves would receive the One who claimed to be their Messiah. As the 'light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world' (John 1:9) had shone upon him, he had, though afar off, discerned the glory of the Son of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

The centurion understood and respected Jewish religious sensitivities. He knew that according to law a Jew was not allowed to enter a Gentile's house; so, he requested that Jesus minister from a distance. The servant was healed. The faith of the Gentile centurion was rewarded. Jesus pointed out that the centurion was a prototype of the great day when people from all over the world would join the Jewish patriarchs at the Messianic banquet.

Whatever else one can take from the accounts of this healing, we can see that vast cultural divides were not able to keep the Jews and this Roman apart. What lessons can we take from this about how we must learn to transcend whatever cultural differences we can (in good conscience) in order to reach out to others?

Dealing With Demons

Read Luke 8:26–39 and Matthew 15:21–28. How do these stories help us understand how Jesus related to non-Jews? How do we understand Jesus’ words to the Canaanite woman? Also, what lessons should the disciples have picked up, seeing Jesus minister to those who were not part of the “covenant people”?

The region of the Gadarenes was an area formerly dominated by Greece, but it had become part of the Roman province of Judaea. The man in the tombs was obviously possessed, and his possession manifested itself in horrific ways. He truly needed divine aid, which he got.

That this liberation took place in Gentile territory is confirmed by the presence of the pigs. It is interesting to notice the reaction to this economic loss when the pigs drowned; the townspeople asked Jesus to leave their territory. Jesus in turn asked the healed man to stay. He was to witness to his own people about Jesus; no doubt, too, his changed life, even more than his words, would be a powerful testimony.

In the next incident, the child in the region of Tyre and Sidon was “‘demon-possessed and suffering terribly’ ” (*Matt. 15:22, NIV*). Her mother, a Canaanite, illustrated the cultural melting pot of that region. Her Canaanite ancestors were displaced from their land when Israel inherited it under the leadership of Joshua. Here, again, we see Jesus reaching out to those who weren’t of Israel proper.

In talking to her, Jesus used somewhat harsh language, likening her people to dogs, but it tested her faith and showed her humble willingness to get the help she needed.

“The Saviour is satisfied. He has tested her faith in Him. By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer an alien, but a child in God’s household. As a child it is her privilege to share in the Father’s gifts. Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 401.

The lesson was that, contrary to their understanding, the work of the gospel is not just for the Jews but is to go to other nations, as well.

Ten Lepers

Read Luke 17:11–19. What lessons are here for us, regardless of our nationality or origins?

Notice first that the unfortunate men all knew Jesus. They called Him by both name and title, pleading for intervention. What's fascinating, too, is that they were not cleansed right then and there. They were told simply to go and present themselves to the priests, as specified in Leviticus 14:2. The fact that they just turned around and went showed that they believed in Him and His power to heal them.

Only the Samaritan, though, expressed appreciation for what Jesus had done. The nine did not forget to go to the priests, but they neglected to give thanks to their Healer. The Samaritan, as the text reads, turned around even before he got to the priests. Though the text doesn't say that the other nine were Jews, the location makes it very likely; besides, the fact that Luke specifically mentioned that he was a Samaritan, and that Jesus called him "this stranger" (*Luke 17:18*), makes it likely that the other nine were, indeed, Jews. Although Jews normally had no dealings with the Samaritans, their malady transcended those barriers. Common misfortune and tragedy, what Albert Schweitzer termed "the fellowship of suffering," had broken down an ethnic divide. Their common need for cleansing, healing, and saving had brought them, collectively, to Jesus.

Nevertheless, Samaritans and other foreigners were not the immediate goal for Jesus' ministry—"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (*Matt. 15:24, NIV*). He planned first to establish a strong mission base among the Jews. Throughout His ministry, however, He gave His followers evidence that the gospel should go to the whole world. Although this point became clear only after His resurrection, even before then Jesus did things that were to open the minds of the disciples to the idea that world mission would become their main task.

Though all these men showed faith, only one turned around and thanked the Lord for what he had received. What does this tell us about the reasons that praise and thanksgiving are so important for faith? What are the things you have to be thankful for? Think about how much happier you'd be if you constantly kept them before you, and what better way than by thanking God for all that you have to be thankful for?

The Greeks and Jesus

“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’ ” (John 12:20–23, NIV). How does this incident help us to understand the heartfelt cry of people everywhere for salvation, for hope, for answers that can be found only in Jesus?

These Greeks were probably converts to Judaism, since they came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. Commentators have noted that these Greeks went to Philip, who, though Jewish, had a Greek name, which might have attracted them to him. Thus, while pioneering Christian work can be accomplished by foreign missionaries who have cultural sensitivity and a sympathetic understanding of the people they want to win for Christ, the most effective groundbreaking work is done by people with the same background as the target people.

The Greeks came only days before Jesus’ crucifixion. They no doubt were amazed by His words about His suffering, death, and final victory. (The voice from heaven gave them something to think about, as well.) Jesus would have been encouraged by their desire to “see” Him. Their approach signaled the beginning of world evangelization. It was acknowledged even by the Pharisees, who had exclaimed, “ ‘The world has gone after Him’ ” (John 12:19, NKJV).

What we see here are men, outside of Judaism, wanting to come to Jesus. What a sign that the world was ready for His atoning death! These Greeks, representing the nations, tribes, and peoples of the world, were being drawn to Him. Soon the Savior’s cross would draw the people of all lands and in all subsequent times to Him (vs. 32). The disciples would find the world ready to receive the gospel.

Read John 12:20–32. What is Jesus saying about losing your life in order to keep it? Why would He say that in this immediate context? How have you experienced just what He is talking about?

Further Study: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” (*Matt. 8:11, 12, NIV*). Though these words were spoken in a particular context, in reference to a particular people, we shouldn’t miss the principle. Those who have been given great privileges, great advantages in terms of spiritual and theological truths, need to be careful. It’s easy to become complacent about truths that we have been given, truths that in some cases no one else is preaching and teaching. First, we need to make sure that we keep ourselves grounded in these truths; then, second, we need to be willing to teach these to those who don’t know them.

Discussion Questions:

- ① The Cross has shown us the absolute universality of all humanity. Before God we are all sinners, and we all need grace for salvation. Nevertheless, many groups often do see themselves as superior to others. This is common and has been all through history. What about yourself and your own ethnic, social, financial, or cultural group? In what ways do you harbor (and don’t fool yourself—you do harbor) a sense of superiority to others different from you? What’s wrong with that attitude, and how can you learn at the foot of the Cross to change it?
- ② The woman at the well went back and witnessed to her own people about Jesus. What does this teach us about missions and the importance of using those of a particular culture to reach their own people?
- ③ The Greeks wanted to see Jesus. No doubt they had heard about Him or had themselves seen some of the things He had done. Jesus, of course, is now in heaven, and the church, His people, represent Him here on earth. What does this mean for us in terms of the kind of life we live and the kind of witness we present?

Faithful Bride: Part 2

by REENA MURMU, BANGLADESH

A year after Bhudroy became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, his elder brother died. Then Shanti became seriously ill with malaria. She didn't respond to medicines, and she became increasingly ill. When the fever left, Shanti's mother-in-law accused her of pretending to be ill. Shanti pleaded with God, "Why are You allowing me to suffer so in this family?" Even her husband grew discouraged and blamed God for their troubles.

Shanti's mother learned of her daughter's grave illness from some other villagers, so she set out to see her daughter. Shanti's mother-in-law greeted Shanti's mother with a demand: "Take her home with you. She is no good to us." Shanti's mother took her daughter home, but her baby, Reena, remained with Shanti's husband and mother-in-law.

Shanti's mother took her to the hospital, where doctors could treat her properly. Meanwhile Shanti's mother-in-law was sure that Shanti would die and began looking for a new wife for Bhudroy. But Bhudroy told them he was not interested in marrying someone else.

In time, Shanti recovered from her illness but, instead of returning to her mother-in-law's home, she stayed with her mother.

Meanwhile her sister-in-law, whose husband had died, demanded that she be given her share of the family's land for her three sons. While she had a right to the family land, her demand put her parents-in-law into crisis, because they could not survive without their land. The selfish daughter-in-law wanted everything she could get for herself and her sons. Slowly Shanti's mother-in-law realized that Shanti had been a faithful daughter-in-law while her other daughter-in-law had been selfish and demanding. She asked Bhudroy to go bring Shanti home.

Bhudroy went to visit Shanti. He told her of his mother's change of heart and invited her to return home with him. Shanti was eager to see her little girl again. She packed her things and returned with her husband.

She was overjoyed to find that her mother-in-law had changed so much. The older woman welcomed Shanti back into the home and treated her with respect and kindness. Shanti was determined to be the best Christian she could, hoping that her once cruel mother-in-law would give her life to Jesus. Several years later, Shanti's mother-in-law gave her life to Christ before she died.

Bhudroy also renewed his commitment to Christ, and now the family lives together in peace as Christians. The faithful young bride had survived trials and taunting and led her husband and parents-in-law to Jesus.

REENA MURMU is the eldest daughter of Shanti and Bhudroy. She would like to become a physician.

Peter and the Gentiles



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 2:5–21; 10:1–8, 23–48; Rom. 2:14–16; Acts 10:9–22; 11:1–10; 15:1–35.*

Memory Text: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’ ” (*Acts 2:38, 39, NKJV*).

Peter was the first apostle to proclaim salvation to the Gentiles. He continued to provide leadership in the church for a number of years after its foundation, even after Paul became the missionary to the Gentiles par excellence. Peter, together with Paul, helped the early church and its leadership, mostly Jews, understand the universality of the Great Commission.

Peter worked to bring about an integrated church, uniting Gentile converts, who were unaware of the finer points of Jewish culture, and Jewish converts whose customs tended to take on the character of divine absolutes. Like all pioneer missionaries, Peter had to discriminate between unchangeable divine absolutes and those practices that are cultural and relative and of no important consequence in the life of the believer, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, it was Peter who, at the Jerusalem Council, declared of the Gentiles that God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (*Acts 15:9*) and who helped work through the issues that threatened the early church’s unity.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.

Peter at Pentecost

Jesus' last words before His ascension were of a missionary nature: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*). Here, again, we see the mandate to spread the gospel into all the world. Only ten days later, this calling started to unfold, with Peter playing a key role.

Read Acts 2:5–21. How does this event show God's intent for the gospel to go worldwide and the role that the Jews were to have in that proclamation?

The Great Commission found its first fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit had as its aim the evangelization of the world. This initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave great results on the Day of Pentecost. This was, however, only a foretaste of much greater results to come in the years that followed.

Peter's sermon contained a few main points that remain relevant even today:

First, Old Testament prophecies and promises are fulfilled in Christ (*Acts 2:17–21*), a truth revealed through the powerful works and signs accompanying His ministry, as well as through His death and resurrection (*vss. 22–24*).

Second, Jesus was exalted, placed at God's right hand, and is now Christ (the Messiah) and Lord of all (*vss. 33–36*). In Him, all who repent and are baptized will receive forgiveness for sins (*vss. 38, 39*).

Here we see the active and vocal disciple Peter standing up for his belief in Jesus. He was called by Jesus to be a strong leader in the church's earliest days. Although less cosmopolitan, efficient, and adaptable to other cultures and religions than was the apostle Paul (*see Gal. 2:11–14*), Peter opened the way for the gospel to go to about fifteen nations, as he preached to Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem. In this way, he used a very important bridge to bring the good news to the Middle Eastern world of his time.

What does the story of Pentecost reveal about our utter need of the Holy Spirit in our lives? What choices can we make in order to be more attuned to the Spirit's leading?

The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 1

Read Acts 10:1–8, 23–48. What does the story of this Gentile becoming a follower of Jesus teach us about salvation and witness?

The conversion of Cornelius, a pagan officer in the Roman army along with his household, has been termed the Gentile Pentecost. It is a crucial story in Acts, one that addresses the most divisive issue facing the early church: Can a Gentile become a Christian without first becoming a Jew?

The Roman army's headquarters for all of Judea, including Jerusalem, was Caesarea. Cornelius would have been one of six centurions commanding the 600 soldiers that made up the Italian cohort based there. His name indicated his descent from an illustrious Roman military family that had earlier produced the commander who had defeated Hannibal, a Carthaginian general who wreaked havoc against Rome for years. More important, Cornelius was a God-fearing man who enjoyed spiritual fellowship with his family, prayed regularly, and was generous to those who were needy. God heard his prayers and sent an angel with a special message to him.

“Believing in God as the Creator of heaven and earth, Cornelius revered Him, acknowledged His authority, and sought His counsel in all the affairs of life. He was faithful to Jehovah in his home life and in his official duties. He had erected the altar of God in his home, for he dared not attempt to carry out his plans or to bear his responsibilities without the help of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 133.

Notice, too, what happened when Cornelius finally met Peter. He bowed down and worshiped him, an act that must have appalled Peter. Thus, what we can see is that this Gentile, favored of God, a devout man, still had a lot of truth to learn, even at the most basic level; no doubt, though, he was about to learn it.

What are some of the traits of Cornelius, even in his ignorance, that we all would do well to follow in our own spiritual lives?

The Conversion of Cornelius: Part 2

“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’ ” (*Acts 10:34, 35, NIV*). Though these words to us are not that revolutionary, for them to have come from the mouth of Peter was an astonishing confession. We have to remember who Peter was, where he came from, and the attitudes that he had and still struggled with. (*See Gal. 2:11–16.*) No doubt, though, his experience with Cornelius helped him see even more clearly the error of his ways and helped him get a better picture of what God had intended to do with the gospel message.

Read Acts 10:33. What did Cornelius say to Peter that showed that he understood, even despite so much ignorance, that following the Lord also meant obeying Him?

Read Acts 11:14. What does it say that shows us the need to spread the gospel, even to such godly men like Cornelius?

How does Romans 2:14–16 help us to understand what was going on with Cornelius?

As we have seen, Cornelius was a Gentile who “feared God” (*Acts 10:2*), though he still had a lot to learn (don’t we all?). Nevertheless, his fasting, his praying, and his giving of alms all revealed a heart open to the Lord; and thus, when the time was right, God worked miraculously in his life.

An important point to remember in this account is how, though an angel appeared to him, the angel didn’t preach the gospel to him. Instead, the angel opened the way for Cornelius to meet Peter, who then told him about Jesus (*see Acts 10:34–44*). We can see here an example of how the Lord uses humans as His messengers to the world.

Peter's Vision

As we saw yesterday, by the time Peter made contact with Cornelius, he had a change in attitude regarding the Gentiles that other Jewish believers hadn't yet understood (*see Acts 10:44, 45*). What happened that changed Peter?

Read Acts 10:9–22 and 11:1–10. What do the passages say about how entrenched Peter's wrong attitudes were that it took something like this to open his mind?

Cornelius's conversion and Peter's role in the witnessing task were so important for the mission of the church that God communicated in a supernatural way with both the missionary and the missionary's eventual host: while an angel visited Cornelius, Peter was given a vision.

Also, Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner (*Acts 9:43; 10:6, 32*), a detail that we don't want to miss. Tanning and tanners were repulsive to the Jews since they handled dead bodies and used excreta in their processes. Tanneries were not allowed in towns; note that Simon's was located "by the sea side" (*Acts 10:6*).

Peter's stay with a tanner indicated that already, before his vision, he realized that some of his previous attitudes were at cross-purposes with the gospel. Both Peter and the family of Cornelius needed to shed some cultural baggage. All people, represented by "all kinds of . . . animals" (*NKJV*) in Peter's vision, are God's children.

Peter's call to witness to Cornelius implied that, although all people are acceptable to God, not all religions are equally acceptable. Cornelius was already a "religious" man, like nearly everyone else in ancient society. As a soldier, he would be acquainted with the worship of Mithra, and as an officer, he would have taken part in emperor worship. But these were not acceptable to God.

There is a lesson here today for those who approach non-Christian religions on the basis of equality with Christianity. Although sometimes it is done in a spirit of political correctness, such an attitude leads to a watering-down of the biblical claims of Christian uniqueness and finality.

How do we show respect for people whose faith we believe is wrong, without giving the impression that we respect those beliefs ourselves? What is the difference between respecting people as opposed to respecting their beliefs?

The Jerusalem Decree

Early success of the mission to the Gentiles raised some crucial questions for the early church regarding what requirements should be expected of Gentile converts—those grafted into the faith (*Rom. 11:17*). Tensions always appear when people from other religions and cultures join an established believing community. In this case, Jewish Christians, with their high regard for the requirements of the Old Testament laws and rituals, assumed that Gentile converts would accept and obey these laws and rituals. The main focus was circumcision, the fundamental indication of entry into the Jewish community for males, symbolizing compliance with all the requirements of Judaism. Should Gentile converts to Christianity be required to undergo circumcision? Some Jewish Christians in Judea certainly thought so and stated their conviction in stark theological language: to them it was essential for salvation.

What happened at the Jerusalem Council that helped settle this important issue? Acts 15:1–35.

Although the question of circumcision was the main reason for the Jerusalem Council, it dealt with a range of cultural practices that the gospel did not require of its converts. The decree of the council (*vss. 23–29*) provided a common platform where Jewish and Gentile Christians could coexist in fellowship. Jewish core values were respected, but Gentiles were allowed to avoid circumcision. The council's decision was both practical and theological. It set a pattern for the church to deal with issues and problems before they became too divisive. Experienced missionaries learn to identify core Christian belief issues and keep the focus on them as opposed to getting bogged down with things that are not essential to the faith.

What lesson can we take away from the Jerusalem Council that could help the church today as it deals with controversial issues? What did they do that can serve as a model for us?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Jew and Gentile,” pp. 188–200, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Peter told of his astonishment when, in speaking the words of truth to those assembled at the home of Cornelius, he witnessed the Holy Spirit taking possession of his hearers, Gentiles as well as Jews. The same light and glory that was reflected upon the circumcised Jews shone also upon the faces of the uncircumcised Gentiles. This was God’s warning that Peter was not to regard one as inferior to the other, for the blood of Christ could cleanse from all uncleanness. . . .

“Peter’s address brought the assembly to a point where they could listen with patience to Paul and Barnabas, who related their experience in working for the Gentiles.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 193, 194.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Peter’s vision has been explained to support the argument that the dietary laws of the Old Testament are no longer valid—specifically, as justification for eating unclean meat. The meaning of the vision was clearly explained by Peter himself: “I should not call any [human] common or unclean” (*Acts 10:28*). The vision was not, therefore, about diet but about acceptance of other humans as God’s children, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, occupation, or religion. Why, though, do people use this as an argument in regard to diet? What should this tell us about how careful we need to be in how we handle Scripture?
- 2** Dwell more on Romans 2:14–16. How should we as a church relate to this idea in terms of missions? That is, why do we need to preach to those who have the law written in their hearts?
- 3** In Thursday’s study, we talked about the Jerusalem Council as a model for the church today. Read over the texts about the council (*Acts 15:1–35*). What are some specific things it did that provide a template for the church today? For instance, look at such things as (1) personal testimonies about witness, (2) the role of the gospel, (3) the role of the Scriptures, (4) the role of missions, and (5) how the people related to each other in the council.

Despair to Hope: Part 1

by CHENGHORN THEAN, CAMBODIA

Chen lived in a slum-like camp for displaced persons in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

One day Chen walked past a house and heard someone speaking to a group of people. Curious, she stared through a window. Was this a church? She wanted to study English, and she had heard that churches often teach English. She waited outside until the program ended. A man walked out and introduced himself as Pastor Hang.

“I want to learn English,” Chen said. Pastor Hang told her that an English class met at the house church on Wednesday afternoons.

On Wednesday afternoon, Chen returned for the English class. The teacher started the class with prayer, and when the class ended, he invited Chen to visit the church on Sabbath. She came to the worship service but knew nothing about God and didn’t understand the sermon. Nevertheless, she wanted to return. She continued studying English on Wednesdays. Two weeks later, Pastor Hang invited Chen to a Bible class on Friday afternoon. She enjoyed learning more about the Christian God and invited Pastor Hang to come to her home to teach her.

Chen told the pastor that she was having marital problems. She explained that she and her husband were not legally married, and her mother-in-law was trying to separate them so that her son could marry a Chinese girl. The couple moved, but then her mother-in-law took their two little sons and refused to allow Chen to see them.

And then her husband began refusing to give her money from his earnings to buy food. The pastor listened sympathetically to Chen’s sad story; then he offered a possible solution. He had noticed that Chen was a natural salesperson. He invited her to sell Seventh-day Adventist books to earn some money. Chen agreed to try. The pastor continued to study the Bible with her and led her to Jesus.

He taught her how to sell the books. Chen followed his directions, but she wasn’t able to sell any books. The best places to sell books are in restaurants early in the morning and during the evening meals. But it was the rainy season, and Chen could not get to these restaurants easily.

When the rains stopped, Chen prayed, “God, if You are the true God, if You want me to follow You, please show Your power by helping me to sell some books tonight.” Then she set a goal to sell three or four books for one dollar each.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

Philip *as* Missionary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 4:18, Acts 2:44–47, 4:34–37, 6:1–7, Acts 8, 21:7–10.

Memory Text: “ ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ ” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

World mission was the main concern of the risen Christ during the 40 days between His crucifixion and ascension. The New Testament preserves at least five of His great commission statements: Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47–49, John 20:21, and Acts 1:5–8. Together, they constitute the greatest assignment ever given to Christians. Among the commands was a geographical strategy for mission outreach, from its Jerusalem base to Judea and Samaria, then ultimately to the ends of the earth. This was a command that they, indeed, took seriously and set out to fulfill.

This geographical strategy is prominent in the mission work of Philip the evangelist. According to Acts 8, his work extended outward from Jerusalem in expanding circles. That is, it kept spreading farther and farther as time progressed.

Who was this Philip the evangelist? What does the Word of God tell us about him and the work that he did during the earliest days of the church? Finally, what lessons can we take away for ourselves from the inspired record of this early missionary?

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

Philip the Evangelist

“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18, NKJV). Think about what Paul is saying here, especially as we study this week about Philip the evangelist, someone of whom we know little except for the few references in the Bible. As we will see, though, Philip did a good work, even though most of what he accomplished we know little about. Who are some people whom you know of who have done great things for God but with little outward recognition? Why is it always important to keep the principle of Paul’s words in mind, especially if we do a work that doesn’t garner much acclaim or attention? See also 1 Cor. 4:13.

Philip was a popular Greek name that means “horse lover.” In the New Testament, there are four persons called by that name. Two had the additional name “Herod” and were part of the Herodian ruling family, which exerted a generally harsh rule over Israel in New Testament times. The remaining Philips had outstanding roles in mission.

The first, Philip of Bethsaida, was a disciple who was instrumental in bringing Nathanael to Jesus (*John 1:43–46*). Later, he brought Greeks to Jesus (*John 12:20, 21*).

The second Philip was designated “the evangelist” in Acts 21:8, to distinguish him from Philip the disciple. He first appeared in the Jerusalem church as a “table waiter” (*Acts 6:2–5*) who turned evangelist and missionary (*Acts 8:12*). His missionary service, extending over twenty years and supplemented by his four prophesying daughters, is mentioned in Acts. We know little else of his background.

“It was Philip who preached the gospel to the Samaritans; it was Philip who had the courage to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. For a time the history of these two workers [Philip and Paul] had been closely intertwined. It was the violent persecution of Saul the Pharisee that had scattered the church at Jerusalem and destroyed the effectiveness of the organization of the seven deacons. The flight from Jerusalem had led Philip to change his manner of labor, and resulted in his pursuing the same calling to which Paul gave his life. Precious hours were these that Paul and Philip spent in each other’s society; thrilling were the memories that they recalled of the days when the light which had shone upon the face of Stephen upturned to Heaven as he suffered martyrdom flashed in its glory upon Saul the persecutor, bringing him, a helpless suppliant, to the feet of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 204.

Waiting on Tables

Read Acts 2:44–47, 4:34–37. What kind of picture of the early church is presented here?

No question, things were for a time going quite well among the early believers. Of course, everyone is fallen, and before long some tensions started to rise.

Read Acts 6:1–7. What problems arose, and how did the church deal with those problems?

Rapid growth of the Jerusalem church brought with it social tension. Philip was appointed to a team to deal with it. Converts included underprivileged and economically challenged persons whose participation in the daily common meals placed increasing demands on church leaders. A murmuring about unfair distribution of food to Greek-speaking widows emerged. This was especially sensitive because of reminders by the Hebrew prophets not to neglect widows and orphans.

To resolve this serious issue, all twelve apostles gathered the believers and proposed the appointment of seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who would literally “deaconize [Greek for “serve”] tables” so the Twelve could “deaconize the Word” (*see Acts 6:3, 4*). All seven had Greek names, perhaps indicating a balancing of welfare service for the neglected Greek-speaking widows. Among them was Philip—the first time that this Philip is mentioned in the Bible.

The apostles argued that additional leadership was needed so that they should not be overworked by the administration of the resources necessary for communal life. They emphasized that their call was to devote themselves to the Word of God and to prayer.

What are some of the potentially divisive issues in your own local church, and how can you allow God to use you to help ease them?

Philip in Samaria

Saul, a future apostle and missionary, makes his first appearance in the Bible at the stoning of the deacon Stephen, the first Christian martyr. This wave of persecution only helped to further spread the gospel.

Read Acts 8:1–6. What was the result of the persecution of the church in Jerusalem?

Samaria was the first stop on the geographical spread of Christianity. Samaritans considered themselves descendants of Israelites left behind when Assyria exiled most of the Israelites in 722 B.C. The Jews, however, considered Samaritans to be descendants of foreigners that the Assyrians forcibly settled in Israel. Jewish-Samaritan relationships during the New Testament era were marked by tensions and outbreaks of violence. However, as we saw earlier, Jesus had already paved the way for mission work there when He dealt with the woman at the well, who, in turn, began to “evangelize” her own people.

Philip’s call to wait on tables now became that of a missionary evangelist to the Samaritans. As a refugee fleeing religious persecution in Jerusalem, he did not waste his time. He proclaimed that the Messiah, awaited by both Jews and Samaritans, had come (*Acts 8:5, 12*).

Read Acts 8:6–15. How successful was Philip’s ministry in Samaria?

Philip was used mightily of the Lord in this early foreign mission field. The statement of the woman at the well, that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (*John 4:9, NKJV*), had now become a thing of the past.

What animosities, grudges, and prejudices that have poisoned your soul need to become “things of the past”? Isn’t it time to let it all go?

With the Ethiopian

According to Acts 8:26–39, Philip’s next contact was with the Ethiopian treasury administrator, bringing mission another step toward “the end of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). Philip was the link between Samaria and the Gaza mission. From Samaria, north of Jerusalem, Philip was called to Gaza, which is south of the city. His work in the north focused on a group; here it focused on a single person. In Samaria, Philip could proclaim Christ only from the five books of Moses, for this was all the Samaritans accepted; here he could also use the book of Isaiah, probably in Greek translation.

Read Acts 8:26–39. As you read, answer the following questions: What were the texts in Isaiah (*from Isaiah 53*) that the Ethiopian was reading, and why would they have given Philip the perfect opportunity to evangelize him?

In contrast to Philip’s work in Samaria, where he did miracles (*Acts 8:6*), all he did with the Ethiopian was study the Bible. What point can we take away from this for ourselves as we minister to others?

The Spirit of the Lord called Philip away as soon as he had finished explaining the “good news about Jesus” and had baptized the Ethiopian. Philip had no opportunity to transmit his beliefs and teachings to his new convert. The Ethiopian was left to embrace the Christian faith in the context of his African culture, guided by the Old Testament and the Spirit of God, which had already been working in him, for he already was a worshiper of the Lord and a believer in His Word.

Philip explained to the Ethiopian crucial Old Testament texts about the death of Jesus. Why must Jesus, His death and resurrection, be central to the message we give to the world? What is our message without Him?

Philip as Evangelist, Father, and Host

Philip, clearly, was anointed to do the Lord's work. Commentators are divided on what "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (*Acts 8:39*) means, whether he was simply told to go to Azotus (*vs. 40*) or was miraculously transported there. Either way, the crucial point for us is that Philip was a man surrendered to the Holy Spirit; and thus, God was able to use him to do a great work for Him.

Read Acts 8:40. What does it tell us about Philip that helps us to understand why he was named the "evangelist"?

Read Acts 21:7–10. What can we learn about Philip from these few verses?

At this stage of the story, we learn that Philip was a family man with four unmarried daughters. Philip's call out of the deaconate into evangelism involved him in extensive travel. We know about the journey from Jerusalem to Samaria, then on to Gaza, followed by "all the towns" on the 50-mile (80-kilometer) coastline between Azotus and Caesarea. There were probably unrecorded journeys. Like all the pioneering missionaries, he would have been harassed, inconvenienced, and subjected to the "ups and downs" such commitments entail. Still, he managed his family to the extent that four daughters were deemed by the Holy Spirit suitable to receive the gift of prophecy. This testifies to good parenting and true godliness in this pioneering Christian missionary family.

The text reveals that the apostle Paul stayed with Philip "a number of days" (*vs. 10, NIV*). Twenty-five years earlier, Paul, then named Saul, had been an aggressive and fierce persecutor of the Christians (*Acts 9:1, 2*). His persecution of Jerusalem believers forced Philip to flee to Samaria (*Acts 8:1–5*). Now, years later, persecutor and persecuted meet in the home of Philip, who hosts Paul's visit. What an interesting meeting of brothers and fellow workers with Christ in the great cause of bringing the gospel to the non-Jewish world!

In our work for others, why is it so crucial to never forget our first obligation, our families?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 103–111.

“When they were scattered by persecution they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a famishing world; and they were constrained by the love of Christ to break this bread to all who were in need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 106.

“And when His disciples were driven from Jerusalem, some found in Samaria a safe asylum. The Samaritans welcomed these messengers of the gospel, and the Jewish converts gathered a precious harvest from among those who had once been their bitterest enemies.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 106, 107.

Discussion Questions:

❶ As we’ve seen, the gospel breaks down barriers between people. At least, that is the ideal; the reality has at times been radically different. What is it about human beings, even among Christians—among those who understand that we are all the same before God, who understand that the Cross is the great equalizer—that we allow cultural, social, and other barriers to divide us to the great extent that they still do? How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is so universal, discourage such prejudices?

❷ As we saw, the persecution of the early church caused believers to flee, and as a result, the gospel started spreading in ways that it might not have done without persecution. Though God was able to bring good out of it, we must remember that religious persecution is never good, never right, never justified. What should our attitude be toward those who are facing religious persecution, even if we don’t agree with their religious beliefs? See *Luke 6:31*.

Despair to Hope: Part 2

by CHENGHORN THEAN, CAMBODIA

That night Chen sold five books for five dollars each. She was convinced that God is the true God. But a month later, her husband told her to stop selling books. “Your work is bringing shame on me,” he said.

Chen’s husband demanded that she stop believing in Jesus and stop selling books. “I can’t do that,” she told him. “I believe in Jesus; I have seen His power at work. And I am selling books to feed myself because you refuse to give me any money.”

“If you refuse to give up this nonsense, I will leave you,” he said. But Chen refused to give up her new faith. When she was baptized a few months later, her husband left her and went to live with his mother and his sons.

For several years, Chen has tried to visit her sons, but she hasn’t been allowed to see them. Although her life is difficult, Chen has not let her personal troubles discourage her. She continues to sell literature to support herself and invites people to the church when they show interest in the books she sells. When people are too poor to buy a book, she urges them to come to the church to meet God. She shares her testimony with them and testifies that God is faithful to those who trust Him.

One woman who used to pay Chen to paint her nails asked Chen why she had become a Christian. Chen smiled and told the woman that God is a loving and powerful God, and He answers her prayers. As the two women stood talking outside the woman’s home, the woman realized that one of her precious earrings was missing. “We must find it!” the woman said, feverishly searching in the dirt for the missing jewelry. “I inherited this from my mother. I must find it.”

The two women searched together for the earring. Chen knew that if they didn’t find the earring, the woman might accuse Chen and the church. The earring was found. The woman was so impressed that Chen’s God could help her find her earring that she asked Chen to take her to Chen’s church on Sabbath.

Chen was crushed when her husband told her that he no longer wanted her for his wife. But Chen put her trust in God; and recently she met a Global Mission pioneer, and the two plan to marry. “Truly God has provided for all my needs,” she says with a gentle smile.

CHENGHORN THEAN is a top literature evangelist and soul winner in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Paul: Background *and* Call



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 9:1; Phil. 3:6, 8; 1 Cor. 15:9, 10; Acts 9:1–22; 26:16–18; Gal. 2:1–17.*

Memory Text: “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’” (*Acts 9:15, 16, NIV*).

One of the most central figures in the New Testament was Paul, originally Saul of Tarsus. Paul was to the early Christian church what Moses was to the children of Israel. The difference is that while Moses brought God's people out from the Gentiles in order that Israel would be able to do God's will, Paul brought God's Word from Israel to the Gentiles in order that the Gentiles could do the same; that is, to do God's will.

More is known about Paul than any other first-century Christian. He is especially remembered for his significant contributions that have influenced Christian outreach during the past two millennia. His missionary visits and activities to the nations around the Mediterranean Sea set a powerful example for Christian missions in coming generations.

Paul is credited with lifting biblical absolutes from their Jewish culture, where civil, ritual, and moral laws were so integrated into the fabric of Jewish life that there was hardly any distinction between the Jewish custom and what they thought was God's everlasting message to the nations.

This week we will take our first look at someone who, other than Jesus Himself, is thought by many to be the most important figure in the New Testament.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.

Saul of Tarsus

Saul was born in Tarsus, an important town on the trade route between Syria and western Asia (*Acts 22:3*). Tarsus was a multicultural center of industry and learning and home for a short time to Rome's most famous orator and senator, Cicero.

Saul's parents were Diaspora Jews (Jews who were not living in the land of Israel) from the tribe of Benjamin. His birth name was Saul (Hebrew *sha'ul*, "asked for [of God]")—though, after he began his mission to the Gentiles (*Acts 13:9*), he took the name Paul (Latin *Paulus*, name of a prominent Roman family). Also, since he was a Pharisee, Paul probably had a wife, though we know nothing about her. In fact, we don't know much about his family at all, though a sister and a nephew are mentioned (*Acts 23:16*). Paul was also a Roman citizen (*Acts 22:25–28*).

Saul was probably educated in a synagogue school in Tarsus until 12 years of age, followed by rabbinic study in Jerusalem with the famous Rabban (this honorary title meant "our rabbi") Gamaliel (*vs. 3*). Like most Jewish males, he learned a trade—in his case, tent making (*Acts 18:3*).

As already stated, Paul was a Pharisee (*Phil. 3:5*). The Pharisees (meaning "separated ones") were known for insisting that all the laws of God, both those written in the books of Moses, as well as those handed down verbally by generations of scribes, were binding on all Jews. Their strict patriotism and detailed obedience to Jewish laws could make them appear to their fellow Jews as hypocritical and judgmental. Paul, however, did not hide the fact that he and his father were Pharisees (*Acts 23:6*).

Paul's pharisaic background was an important element in his successful missionary work for both Jews and Gentiles. It equipped him with detailed knowledge of the Old Testament, the only Scriptures available to early Christians. It also acquainted him with the scribal additions to, and expansions of, the Old Testament laws. He was thus the apostle best qualified to discern between timeless, Scripture-based divine absolutes on the one hand and later Jewish cultural additions, which were not binding, and which therefore could be ignored by Gentile followers of Jesus. As we have seen, this issue would become a very important one in the life of the early church. Today, too, the role of culture in the church creates issues for the church to address.

Which of our Christian beliefs seem to conflict most sharply with the surrounding culture? How do you deal with the conflict without compromising what must never be compromised?

Paul, the Man

Personality traits are an individual's typical responses to surrounding domestic, cultural, or educational circumstances. Character is the combination of traits, qualities, and abilities that make up what sort of person an individual is.

Read Acts 9:1; Philippians 3:6, 8; 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 1 Timothy 1:16; Galatians 1:14; and 2 Corinthians 11:23–33. What do these texts tell us about Paul's character and personality?

Paul was clearly a man of great conviction and zeal. Before his born-again experience, he used his zeal to persecute the early church. He supported the stoning of Stephen (*Acts 7:58*), took the initiative in imprisoning Christian women, as well as men (*Acts 8:3*), made murderous threats against the disciples (*Acts 9:1*), and organized a raid on Christians in a foreign country (*Acts 9:2, Gal. 1:13*).

At the same time, too, we can see how Paul's zeal and fervency were to be used for good, as he dedicated his life to the preaching of the gospel, despite incredible hardships and challenges. Only a man totally dedicated to what he believed would have done as he did. And though he lost all things for Christ, he counted them as "rubbish," which comes from a Greek word that means something that is useless, like garbage. Paul understood what was important in life and what wasn't.

Paul was also a humble man. No doubt, partly from the guilt of his former persecution of Christians, he viewed himself as unworthy of his high calling. And also as someone who preached the righteousness of Christ as our only hope of salvation, he knew just how sinful he was in contrast to a holy God, and such knowledge was more than enough to keep him humble, surrendered, and grateful.

"One ray of the glory of God, one gleam of the purity of Christ, penetrating the soul, makes every spot of defilement painfully distinct, and lays bare the deformity and defects of the human character. It makes apparent the unhallowed desires, the infidelity of the heart, the impurity of the lips."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 29.

None of us is immune to pride. How should focusing on the Cross and what it means cure anyone of that sin?

From Saul to Paul

Read Acts 9:1–22, the story of Paul’s conversion. How was this experience linked to his missionary calling? See also Acts 26:16–18.

Right from the start, it was clear that the Lord had intended to use Paul to reach both Jews and Gentiles. No other event in Paul’s preparation as missionary and theologian compared in importance to his conversion; indeed, often in his witness he would talk about that experience.

“ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me’ ” (Acts 26:16, NIV). Paul couldn’t preach or teach about what he didn’t know. No, instead he would preach and teach out of his own experiences with, and knowledge of, the Lord, all the time in harmony with the Word of God. (See Rom. 1:1, 2.)

Read Acts 26:18. What would be the result of Paul’s work?

From this we can see five results of authentic missionary work:

1. Open people’s eyes. Make God and Jesus real, present, active, and appealing.
2. Move from darkness to light, ignorance to knowledge—a core gospel theme. (See Luke 1:78, 79.)
3. Turn from the power of Satan to God.
4. Receive forgiveness of sins. The problem of sin has a solution. This is the living, healing, core message of Christians.
5. Receive a place among the sanctified; this means membership in God’s church, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or nationality.

If someone were to ask you, “What about your own experience with Jesus? What can you tell me about Him?” what would you say?

Paul in the Mission Field

“From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19, NKJV). What crucial element for any kind of mission work can we find in this text? See also 1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2, Gal. 6:14, Phil. 1:15–18.

One thing is certain about all Paul’s missionary endeavors: no matter where he went, the preaching of Christ and Him crucified was central to his message. By making it so, he was being faithful to the call that Christ had first given him, that he should preach about Jesus. The message for missions today is obvious: whatever else we preach and teach (and as Seventh-day Adventists, we have been given so much that needs to be shared with the world), we must keep Christ and Him crucified at the front and center of all our outreach and mission work.

Paul, though, didn’t preach Jesus just as some sort of objective truth and then go on his merry way. Central to his work was to raise up churches, to start Christian communities region by region throughout his part of the world wherever he could. In the truest sense, his work was “church planting.”

There is another element to Paul’s missionary work, as well.

Read Colossians 1:28. What does it sound like Paul is saying? That is, is this evangelism or discipleship?

If one reads many of Paul’s epistles, it’s clear that they often are not evangelistic, at least in the sense that we use the term, that of reaching out to the unchurched. On the contrary, many of the letters were written to established church communities. In other words, included in Paul’s missionary endeavors was the work of pastoral care, edification, and nurturing the churches.

So, we can see at least three central elements to Paul’s missionary activity: proclaiming Jesus, church planting, and nurturing established churches.

Think about the last time you witnessed to someone, in whatever capacity. How central was Jesus to what you said? How can you make sure that you always keep Him central?

Mission and Multiculturalism

“Multiculturalism” is a recent term, first appearing in print in the 1960s, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For many ancient peoples, there were only two categories of humanity—us and them, our tribe and not our tribe. For Greeks, all non-Greeks were “barbarians.” For Jews, all non-Jews were “Gentiles.”

As we have seen already, the success of the Gentile mission forced the infant church and its leaders to deal with the Jew/Gentile divide. The question, at heart, was whether a Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew.

Read Galatians 2:1–17. What happened here, and how does this account illustrate, in its own way, the challenge of “multiculturalism” in outreach and mission?

“When Peter, at a later date, visited Antioch, he won the confidence of many by his prudent conduct toward the Gentile converts. For a time he acted in accordance with the light given from heaven. He so far overcame his natural prejudice as to sit at table with the Gentile converts. But when certain Jews who were zealous for the ceremonial law came from Jerusalem, Peter injudiciously changed his deportment toward the converts from paganism. . . . This revelation of weakness on the part of those who had been respected and loved as leaders left a most painful impression on the minds of the Gentile believers. The church was threatened with division.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 198.

Paul faced the issue with Peter and took a firm stand for what today could be called a multicultural church. His Gentile converts would not have to become Jewish in order to become Christian. Paul’s complex background as a devout Pharisee, student of Rabban Gamaliel, Roman citizen, fundamentalist persecuting zealot, and finally convert and apostle of Jesus Christ, eminently qualified him to distinguish timeless, unchanging divine absolutes on one hand and their temporary cultural and religious vehicles on the other.

How do you distinguish between the essentials of our faith and purely cultural, social, or even personal preferences?

Further Study: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:22, 23, NIV).

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, NIV. Modern missiology applies the term “contextualization” to Paul’s mission methods stated here. Contextualization is defined as “attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.”—Darrell L. Whiteman, “Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 21 (January 1997): p. 2.

“The Jewish Christians living within sight of the temple naturally allowed their minds to revert to the peculiar privileges of the Jews as a nation. When they saw the Christian church departing from the ceremonies and traditions of Judaism, and perceived that the peculiar sacredness with which the Jewish customs had been invested would soon be lost sight of in the light of the new faith, many grew indignant with Paul as the one who had, in a large measure, caused this change. Even the disciples were not all prepared to accept willingly the decision of the council. Some were zealous for the ceremonial law, and they regarded Paul with disfavor because they thought that his principles in regard to the obligations of the Jewish law were lax.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 197.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read 1 Corinthians 9:20. What lessons can we draw from these words that can help us to understand and contextualize how we do mission, or even how we can do personal ministry and witness?
- 2 Despite Paul’s sinful, even shameful, past, God forgave Paul and used him in a mighty way. How can we learn to forgive ourselves for what we might have done and, claiming the righteousness of Christ as our own, seek to be used mightily of Him, as well?

The Stolen Sermons: Part 1

by GAMINI MENDIS

I wanted to call a meeting of all the clergy in my town in Sri Lanka. I thought we needed to pray and fellowship together. I reviewed the list to be sure I hadn't forgotten any pastor. I knew that some of the clergy wouldn't be happy that I was inviting the Seventh-day Adventist pastor, for they thought Seventh-day Adventists were part of a cult, but I wanted to include every minister.

I hadn't met many of the clergy before, and it was a good chance to talk with them. I was especially interested to learn more about the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When the Adventist pastor told me that his church worshiped on Saturday instead of Sunday, I was intrigued. But my interest was for a purely selfish reason. I decided to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church on Saturday and listen to the pastor's sermons. Then I could use his material to help me preach a sermon on Sunday. It would save me a lot of work!

The next Saturday I visited the Seventh-day Adventist church. I was warmly welcomed by the pastor and his congregation. I listened closely to the sermon and took careful notes. The following day, I preached the same sermon I had heard in the Seventh-day Adventist church with just a few minor changes. *This makes my life so much easier*, I thought. The next Saturday, I went to the Seventh-day Adventist church again and took notes from the sermon. I used those notes to preach to my congregation on Sunday. The next week it was the same. Saturday night I went to sleep smiling at my brilliant idea to save work.

During the night, I awakened feeling a sudden sharp pain in my shoulder. I jumped up and turned on the light. I had been bitten by a snake. My wife and I frantically searched for the snake in our room, but we couldn't find it. My wife took me to the hospital, but we couldn't tell the doctors what kind of snake it was so they were not able to give me the right antivenom treatment. I lost consciousness, and the doctor thought I had died.

I was taken to the mortuary, and my brother brought a coffin. My family and friends started weeping over my body. After some time, someone touched me. Perhaps they felt warmth where the skin should have been cold, but they checked and found I still had a weak pulse. Excitedly, they rushed me into the hospital's intensive care unit.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Paul: Mission *and* Message



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 1:22–24, 1 Tim. 6:12, 2 Tim. 4:7, 1 Cor. 15:12–22, Acts 15:38–41.*

Memory Text: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 3:13, 14, NKJV*).

Drawing on Old Testament prophetic messages, Jewish history, and the life and teachings of Jesus, Paul developed the Christian concept of salvation history, all centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Because of his cultural background in both Judaism and in Greco-Roman society, Paul possessed sufficient insights to allow him to lift the gospel out from the complexity of Hebrew civil, ritual, and moral practices of Jewish life and make it more accessible to a multicultural world.

Paul’s 13 letters to the believers applied faith to their lives. He touched doctrinal, as well as practical, topics. He counseled, encouraged, and admonished on matters of personal Christianity, relationships, and church life. Nevertheless, throughout his letters his main theme was “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV*).

Paul was not only a man of letters. He also became known as the apostolic missionary par excellence, witnessing to the gospel from Syria to Italy, perhaps even to Spain. Within a decade, Paul established churches in four provinces of the Roman Empire.

This week we will take a look at Paul—both his mission and his message.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 19.

Greeks and Jews

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22–24. How do these verses help us to understand the different ways people relate to truth? What can we learn here that can help us in our witnessing to various people groups?

In the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, God worked remarkable signs of providential care for Israel. Later generations of Jews developed the expectation that any new messenger sent from God should make themselves known by signs and wonders and miracles.

In contrast, in line with their philosophical and scientific heritage, Greeks sought a rational basis for belief, one that would satisfy the demands of human wisdom.

Paul did not dismiss the cultural and spiritual heritage of his target peoples but used it as an entry point for proclaiming Christ crucified. Those who desired signs found them in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the early church. Those who wanted logical elegance and rationality found it in Paul’s arguments for the gospel message. Both types of persons ultimately had only one need, and that was to know the risen Christ and “the power of his resurrection” (*Phil. 3:10*). How Paul brought them to that knowledge depended upon the people to whom he was witnessing.

When Paul preached to Jewish listeners, he based his sermons on the history of Israel, linking Christ to David, and emphasizing the Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ and foretelling His crucifixion and resurrection (*Acts 13:16–41*). That is, he started out with what was familiar to them, with what they revered and believed, and from that starting point he sought to bring them to Christ.

For Gentiles, Paul’s message included God as Creator, Upholder, and Judge; the entry of sin into the world; salvation through Jesus Christ (*Acts 14:15–17, 17:22–31*). Paul had to work from a different starting point with these people than he did with the Jews (or with Gentiles who believed in the Jewish faith). Here, too, though, his goal was to lead them to Jesus.

Think about your own faith. On what is it based? What good reasons do you have for it? How might your reasons differ from those of other people, and why is it important to recognize these differences?

Soldiers and Athletes

As a skilled communicator, Paul in his mission work used the familiar to explain the unfamiliar. He took everyday features of the Greco-Roman world to illustrate the practical reality of new life in Christ. He drew especially from two areas of his converts' world for his teaching metaphors—athletes with their games and the ever-present Roman soldier.

Fondness for athletic accomplishments gripped Paul's world, much as it does ours. Ancient Greeks transmitted their love of competition by holding, over the centuries, no fewer than four separate cycles of Olympic-type contests, located in different parts of Greece. Romans inherited and further promoted athletic competition. Foot races were the most popular events and included a race of men wearing full suits of military armor. Wrestling also was popular. Athletes trained assiduously, and winners were richly rewarded. Ethnicity, nationality, and social class mattered little, since endurance and performance were the goals.

What key lessons for the Christian life would Paul's readers have found in the following passages? *1 Cor. 9:24–27, Gal. 5:7, 1 Tim. 6:12, 2 Tim. 2:5.*

Starting with Marius, Roman emperors replaced temporary soldiers with full-time career warriors, garrisoned them across the Roman Empire, and upgraded and standardized their armor and weapons. By Paul's time, soldiers were recruited from various ethnic and national groups, whether or not they were Roman citizens. In return for rewards at the end of their term of service, soldiers pledged total loyalty to the ruling emperor, who in times of conflict personally led them into battle.

In the following passages, what comparisons did Paul make between soldiering and the Christian life? *2 Cor. 10:4, 5; Eph. 6:10–18; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3, 4.*

In what is perhaps Paul's final letter, he applied both soldiering and athletics to his own view of his life as a Christian missionary: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (*2 Tim. 4:7, NIV*).

In what ways is faith a fight and in what ways a race? How have you experienced the reality of both metaphors in your own Christian life? Which metaphor best describes your own experience, and why?

Paul and the Law

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31, NIV). What law must Paul be talking about here?

In English translations of Paul’s letters, the word *law* appears about one hundred thirty times, and in Acts of the Apostles, about twenty times. Paul endeavored to get his hearers and readers, regardless of cultural background, to understand that “law” carried several meanings, especially for Jews. Laws such as the Ten Commandments are in force for all people at all times. But other kinds of laws in the Old Testament and in Jewish culture, Paul did not consider in force for Christians.

In his writings, the apostle used the word *law* broadly in reference to rules for religious ceremonies, civil law, health laws, and purification laws. He wrote about being “under the law” (Rom. 3:19) and about being “released from the law” (Rom. 7:6, NIV). He described a “law of sin” (vs. 25) but also “law [that] is holy” (vs. 12). He mentioned the “law of Moses” (1 Cor. 9:9) but also the “law of God” (Rom. 7:25). Confusing as these phrases may seem to non-Jews, for the Jewish believer brought up in the Hebrew culture, the context would make clear which law was meant.

Read Romans 13:8–10; Romans 2:21–24; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 4:25, 28; 5:3; 6:2. How do these verses help us to understand that God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments, was not nullified at the Cross?

Paul realized that the ceremonial laws, detailing how one approached God through priesthood, Hebrew sanctuary, and sacrifices, ceased to be valid after the Crucifixion. They had served their purpose in their time but were now no longer needed. (This point would become especially apparent after the destruction of the temple.)

With the moral law expressed by the Ten Commandments, however, matters are different. In his letters, Paul quotes some of the Ten Commandments and alludes to others as universal ethical demands on all people, Jewish as well as Gentile. Having written against the practice of sin, Paul would not in any way have diminished the very law that defines what sin is. That would make about as much sense as telling someone not to violate the speed limit while at the same time telling them the speed limit signs are no longer valid.

The Cross and the Resurrection

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV*).

No question, the cross of Christ was central to all that Paul lived and taught. But Paul didn't teach the Cross in a vacuum; instead, he taught it in the context of other teachings, as well; and one of them, perhaps the one most intricately linked to the Cross, was the Resurrection, without which the Cross would have been in vain.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–22. What do these verses say that show how crucial the death and resurrection of Jesus are to the gospel? Why is a proper understanding of death as a sleep crucial for making sense of these texts? That is, if the dead in Christ are already in heaven, what is Paul talking about here?

Unfortunately, the majority of Christian traditions, as well as non-Christian religions, believe strongly in the immortality of the human soul. Against this belief, however, Paul emphasized repeatedly that:

1. Only God has immortality (*1 Tim. 6:16*);
2. Immortality is a gift from God to the saved (*1 Thess. 4:16*);
3. Death is a sleep until Christ returns (*1 Thess. 4:13–15; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20*).

Worship in almost all religions includes numerous false teachings based on the false concept of the immortality of the soul. These errors include things such as reincarnation, praying to saints, veneration of ancestral spirits, an eternally burning hell, and many New Age practices, such as channeling or astral projection. A true understanding of the Bible's teaching on death is the only real protection against these great deceptions. How unfortunate, too, that those who show the strongest inclination against accepting this truth are Christians of other denominations.

A believer closes his or her eyes in death and, after what seems like a moment of darkness and silence, he or she is awakened to eternal life at the Second Coming. What does the truth about the state of the dead reveal to us about God's character?

Getting Along

Paul was a hard worker with a strong personality and singleness of purpose. Such persons can be loners with few friends but many admirers. However, on his travels, two or three fellow workers often accompanied Paul. At least eight of these close fellow workers are mentioned by name (*Acts 13:2; 15:22, 37; 16:1–3; 19:22; Col. 4:7, 10, 11; Philem. 24*). To this must be added Paul's greetings to 24 people in Romans 16, in addition to general greetings to households.

The apostle believed in teamwork, especially in pioneering situations. At the same time, however, he did at times have conflict with fellow laborers.

Read Acts 15:38–41. What happened here, and what does it tell us about the humanity of even these great workers for the Lord?

“It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord’s work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. . . . This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 169, 170.

The account in Acts reveals that Paul expected his companions to persevere in the toils and perils of their mission. For Paul, the close team constituted a church in miniature. He stressed the importance of setting a good example, the imitation model of mission. Dutiful yet loving relationships among team members became a pattern for the churches, which were often based on households. The team also provided an ideal setting for the training of new evangelists and missionaries. Of course, at times things didn’t always run smoothly, as in the case of John Mark.

Read 2 Timothy 4:11. What does this text reveal about growth and forgiveness?

We all make mistakes. How can you learn to forgive those whose mistakes have hurt you? And think also about those whom you’ve hurt with your mistakes. How have you sought to bring healing in those situations? Or if you haven’t yet, why not do it now?

Further Study: The apostle Paul has been compared with the butterfly effect in chaos theory: that “the flap of a butterfly’s wings in California causes a hurricane in Asia.” His work as a writer and preacher helped turn a Jewish sect in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire into a world religion. The ideas put forth in his 13 letters have probably exerted greater influence than any other ancient Greek literature of comparable size.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Paul avoided martyrdom by fleeing to Athens, the intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world. Cities provide shelter for refugees, including Christians. The apostle lost no time; after observing the city’s religious monuments, he reasoned with the Jews and preached in the marketplace. Read Acts 17:16–31. What approach does Paul take with these people, and how does it help us to understand the need to tailor the message for various people groups? At the same time, look at how Paul did not in any way water down or compromise truth in order to reach these people. In our attempts to reach others, how can we be certain that we don’t compromise core beliefs?
- 2** Why is the state of the dead such an important teaching? What are some of the many errors and deceptions that an understanding of this truth protects us against? What about your own culture? What are some of the beliefs against which this truth can be a bulwark?
- 3** Dwell more on the question of the role of signs in regard to faith and the role of logic and reason, as well. In class, let those who are willing talk about how they came to faith and what role such factors as signs or logic, and so on, had in their experiences. Also, what role should they have, not just in coming to faith but in maintaining faith?
- 4** What about the majority of people in your society? What kind of background do they have? What kind of beliefs are the most common? Based on your understanding of their beliefs and background, think through carefully the best approach to reach out to them. What are some entering wedges that will allow you to make contact in a way that will not immediately offend them?

The Stolen Sermons: Part 2

by GAMINI MENDIS

I remained in the hospital for two weeks in great pain but slowly began to recover. Many pastors came to visit me. Some said that God struck me down because I had visited the Seventh-day Adventist church. The Adventist pastor visited me several times and brought me a book entitled *The Great Controversy*. I had lots of time to read, and by the time I was discharged, I had finished the book. When the Adventist pastor came to visit me at home, I had many questions.

When I had recovered enough to preach at my church again, I went back to visiting the Seventh-day Adventist church to borrow the pastor's sermon notes. Of course, I didn't tell him what I was doing, nor did I tell my own congregation where I was getting my sermon material.

One Sabbath the Adventist pastor preached a sermon on the Sabbath. I borrowed that sermon too. After I preached, members of my church asked me why we worship on Sunday if Saturday is God's holy Sabbath.

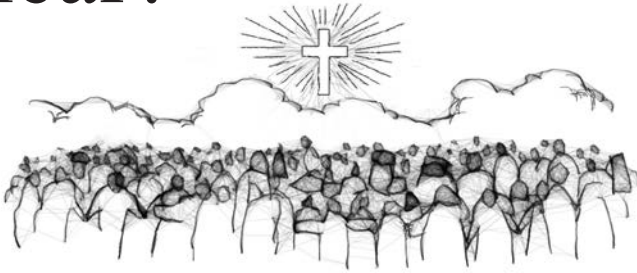
Suddenly, I realized that I was trapped by my own cunning. I needed more information so I could answer my congregation's questions. I visited the Adventist pastor and asked him to study the Bible with me, beginning with the Sabbath. After we studied, I asked him all the questions I thought my congregation would ask. Then I called my church members together to give them the same Bible study on the Sabbath. Not all were interested in this new truth, but many wanted to learn more.

Word reached the church leaders in my denomination that I was teaching Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. They told me that if I insisted on preaching like an Adventist pastor I couldn't continue as pastor in my church. By this time I believed in the Sabbath and other Bible truths I had learned through borrowing the pastor's sermons.

I decided to become a Seventh-day Adventist, turn my church into a Seventh-day Adventist church, and bring as many members of my congregation with me as would listen. Sundays became Bible study days in my church, and several Adventist pastors came to help me teach the people. For three or four months, we studied the Bible intensely and tried to understand God's will for our lives and our church. Then we held a baptism in which 20 members of my church joined the Seventh-day Adventist family. Later 13 more people were baptized. More than half the members of my little congregation have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

GAMINI MENDIS continues to work as a pastor in the same area of Sri Lanka where he once pastored a charismatic church. He now has three Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Must *the* Whole World Hear?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Acts 4:12, Ps. 87:4–6, John 10:16, Rom. 2:12–16, John 14:6, Rom. 1:18.

Memory Text: “Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:25–27, NIV).

As we have seen, the Lord uses people to bring the message of the gospel to others. However, throughout the ages, millions have died without knowing the biblical plan of salvation. The fact is that a majority of those who have ever lived have not heard the story of redemption or known about the good news of God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. This leads to two persistent questions. First, on the day of judgment, how is God going to deal with these billions who have not known Him? Second, is there salvation outside of someone's knowing the plan of salvation as it is in Jesus?

Some would answer that there is salvation in a single Christian denomination only; in contrast, others believe that all religions are equally valid guides to God and eternal life.

In the end, the crucial point to remember is that Jesus has revealed to us the character of God, and this tells us a lot about His love for all humanity and His desire for as many as possible to be saved. God is a God of justice, and however He works it out, the shout will be heard across heaven: “ ‘Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!’ ” (Rev. 15:3, NKJV).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.

No Other Name Under Heaven

Some Christians have the conviction that only those who hear and respond positively to the Christian gospel can be saved. The people, sometimes called “exclusivists,” regard all non-Christian religions as constructs of fallen humans, which express willful rebellion against God. Non-Christians are, they believe for that reason, outside the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Some Christians take the further step of claiming that outside their specific denomination and doctrinal structure there is no salvation, even for other confessing Christians. For them, other denominations with their divergent beliefs have placed themselves outside the care of God and have no chance of entering the kingdom of heaven. For instance, in 1302 in his papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, Pope Boniface VIII declared “that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” Some Protestants have taught something similar in regard to their own denominations, as well.

Read Acts 4:12. What is it saying, and how are we to understand these words?

The words of the Scripture here are very clear: salvation is found only in Jesus Christ and in no other name under heaven. It’s important, however, not to read into these words more than they specifically say.

Imagine a man in a building that is on fire; before being able to escape, he is overcome by smoke and collapses unconscious. A fire-fighter finds him on the floor, grabs him, and brings him outside, where the medics take over. He is rushed to the hospital, and a few hours later he regains consciousness.

The point is that this person, who was saved, had no idea who had saved him. In the same way, anyone who is saved—either before Jesus came in the flesh or after—will be saved only through Jesus, whether or not that person had heard of His name or of the plan of salvation.

“Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

How Much Must One Know?

Picking up where we left off on Sunday, we can see that although the work of Christ provides the only means of salvation, some believe that explicit knowledge of Christ is not necessary in order for one to be saved.

This does not imply that salvation is available apart from Christ but that God is able and willing to apply the merits of Christ's work to whomever He wishes. Some believe that those who do not know Christ and have never been exposed to the gospel, but who under the influence of the Holy Spirit feel a need for deliverance, and act on it, will be saved. The quote from Ellen G. White at the end of yesterday's study certainly implies this (think of Job and Melchizedek).

What light do the following texts shed on this idea?

Ps. 87:4–6 _____

John 10:16 _____

Acts 14:17 _____

Acts 17:26–28 _____

Rom. 2:12–16 _____

“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (*Rom. 2:6, 7, NIV*).

Paul here declares that there are some outside of Christianity who will receive eternal life as a result of an “obedience-unto-life” principle (*cf. Lev. 18:5*). For those “Gentiles” who “show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts” because “their consciences also bearing witness” (*Rom. 2:15, NIV*), it will make a difference on Judgment Day because these people have responded to the work of the Spirit in their hearts.

Because we don't know people's hearts, why in all cases, either with professed Christians or non-Christians, must we be careful not to judge their souls' salvation?

Universalism and Pluralism

Some people teach that in the end God is going to save all human beings, regardless of what they believed or even how they lived. “Universalism” is the conviction that all persons are so related to God that they will be saved, even if they never heard or believed the gospel. After all, John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world.” Thus, in this thinking, if He loves everyone, how can anyone be lost, especially if being lost means eternal torment in hell? How could God burn forever someone whom He loves? Hence, we can see how one false doctrine (eternal torment) leads to another (universalism).

Related to universalism is “pluralism,” the conviction that all religions are equally valid and lead equally to God and salvation. No religion is inherently better than, or superior to, any other religion, at least according to this theology. A pastor in a church in California wrote on the church Web site that his congregation “does not believe that Christianity is superior in any way to other religious beliefs.”

For pluralists, the vast range of religious rituals and beliefs, symbols and metaphors, are mere surface differences concealing a similar core of all religions. Pluralists point out, for example, that most religions emphasize love for God and love for fellow human beings, a form of the golden rule, and hope for a blessed future life. According to them, all faiths, at the core, teach the same thing; hence, they are all valid paths to God, and it is very chauvinistic and arrogant to try to push Christian beliefs upon those who are members of non-Christian faiths.

What does the Bible have to say about both universalism and pluralism? *John 14:6; Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:8; Dan. 12:2; John 3:18; Matt. 7:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.*

No question, both universalism and pluralism are contrary to Scripture. Not everyone will be saved; and all faiths do not lead to salvation.

What answer would you give to someone who argues that Christianity’s claim to be the only true path to salvation (see *John 14:6*) is arrogant and exclusivist? Share your answer with your class on Sabbath.

Sinners in Need of Grace

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17, NIV). What great hope is found in this verse for all humanity? How can we take this crucial truth and, first, make it our own? How then can we use it to motivate us to reach out to others?

According to the Bible, we are all sinners (*Rom. 3:23*), and God wishes for all to repent (*Acts 17:30, 26:20, 2 Pet. 3:9*) and be saved (*1 Tim. 2:4*). From the Fall in Eden onward, God’s purpose has been to save humanity from the devastation and ultimate eternal death that sin and rebellion have brought to humanity. What more proof do we need than the Cross to show God’s love for us and His desire to save us?

However, Scripture is clear that God will not save those who openly rebel against Him.

Read Genesis 6:11–13, Romans 1:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:12, Revelation 21:8, 22:15. What powerful warning is found in these verses?

God loves all people, but all people are sinners in need of grace, and this grace has been revealed in Jesus. He has called His church to spread the good news of this grace to the world.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

In what ways can you personally (not the pastor, not the elder, not the deacon, but you) better learn to “show forth His glory” to a dying world? What must you change in your life in order to do this?

The Mission Call

“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (*1 Cor. 9:22, 23, NIV*). **What important principle is Paul espousing here, and how can we reflect this same attitude in our own lives?**

The Lord of missions, in His wisdom, chose to work through humans to bring the message of forgiveness and salvation to the world. God chose men and women, despite their weaknesses, to work together with the Holy Spirit and the angels. Israel was to be God’s steady “light” in Old Testament times, but too often they put their light “under a basket” (*Matt. 5:15, NKJV*). Too many times the blessings they received were kept inside Israel. Instead of mixing and sharing, they shut themselves away from the nations in order to escape “contamination.”

God’s next plan for world mission called for the salt method—to go “and make disciples” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV; Mark 16:15, 20; Acts 1:8*). The history of Christian missions sparkles with stories of self-sacrificing missionaries who went as salt to the world, bringing the gospel of life to individuals, communities, and sometimes entire nations.

However, as with ancient Israel, too often these mission successes have been obscured by the human shortcomings of the missionaries themselves and their overall mission enterprise. These human shortcomings include (1) poor planning for outreach, inadequate understanding of the task; (2) narrow focus on mission only as education, health care, disaster relief, or development, which overshadow preaching the gospel; (3) underfunding and understaffing by the sending organizations; (4) missionaries unsuited to the task; and (5) nations that forbid the preaching of the gospel.

Of course, no one ever said that it was going to be easy. We are in the midst of a great controversy, and the enemy will work every way he can to thwart our outreach efforts, whether in our own neighborhoods or in the most “remote” corners of the world. We, though, mustn’t be discouraged, because we have been given many wonderful promises of power, and we can be sure that God will fulfill His purposes on earth. As we have been told: “ ‘So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it’ ” (*Isa. 55:11, NKJV*).

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 633; “Speedy Preparation,” in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 335; “Extension of the Work in Foreign Fields,” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 23.

The New Testament employs two Greek nouns, accompanied by the adjective “all,” to express the worldwide extent of Christian mission: “all the *kosmos*” in Matthew 26:13, Mark 14:9, and 16:15, and “all the *oikoumenē*” in Matthew 24:14. While *kosmos*, the more general term for the realm of orderly existence, signifies the planet (with approximately one hundred fifty New Testament occurrences), the more specific *oikoumenē* focuses on the world’s human inhabitants.

How extensive was “the whole world” for the first Christians? Within a few years of the Crucifixion, they had reached modern-day Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy. There is evidence that they propagated the gospel as far as southern Russia (ancient Scythia) in the north, Ethiopia in the south, India in the east, and Spain in the west.

Did the early Christian missionaries believe they had to reach the whole world with the gospel? According to Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the “birthday” of the Christian church, began to proclaim the “mighty works of God” to visitors from a list of nations, geographic regions, and ethnic groups (*Acts 2:5–11*). From its first day of life, the Christian church has been aware of the worldwide extent of its mission. If they had that understanding back then, how much more so should we today?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to the final question on Tuesday’s study about Christian claims being exclusivist and arrogant. Does exclusivism necessarily translate into arrogance? If not, why not?
- 2 The church’s understanding of the size and extent of “the whole world” has expanded since the Day of Pentecost. Jesus’ gospel commission to “‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*) will remain present truth for the church until Christ returns. How does the proclamation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 fit in with the Great Commission?
- 3 How would you answer this question: If people can be saved without ever having heard the gospel, what’s the point of risking life and limb in order to spread it to them?

Providential Bus Encounter

by KUSUMAWATHIE PERERA

One morning I was riding a bus to Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. I saw Francis, a longtime family friend, sitting nearby. I hadn't seen him in a long time and was surprised to learn that he had become a Seventh-day Adventist. I, too, had become a Christian two years earlier.

"I was paralyzed and unable to do anything," I told Francis. "Then some Christians prayed for me, and God healed me. I attended their church, but some things they do in their worship service make me uncomfortable—jumping around, shouting, and rolling on the floor, and talking in strange languages. Lately, I haven't gone to church."

Francis offered to bring a friend to visit me. "We can study the Bible together. I'll tell you a little about the Seventh-day Adventists and what we believe," he offered.

A few weeks later, Francis came with his pastor. We had a pleasant visit, and the pastor talked about God and Jesus in such simple and easy-to-understand language that I felt very close to Him. Then he prayed for my family and me. His prayer was like a beautiful conversation with a friend.

Francis and the pastor visited me often and shared God's truths with me. I enjoyed the Bible studies, but my husband wanted nothing to do with God.

One day, my husband came home drunk when the pastor and Francis were still there. My husband often got drunk, sometimes becoming violent, breaking up the furniture and terrifying the children and me.

When the pastor saw my husband's condition, he prayed for him. I knew that my husband would never remember even seeing the pastor, but I was glad that the pastor was willing to pray for him.

The next morning, my husband was sober. He remembered almost nothing of the previous day's drinking binge, but he remembered that the pastor had prayed for him. In some mysterious way that prayer had touched him, and he said he was healed from drinking. I wanted to believe him, but he had promised to stop drinking before, and it never lasted. But from that day on, my husband never touched alcohol again.

When the pastor and Francis visited again, I told them what had happened to my husband, and we rejoiced together. When I completed Bible studies, I was baptized and became a Seventh-day Adventist. Although my husband has not yet given his life to God, I know he believes, and one day he will come to the Savior.

KUSUMAWATHIE PERERA is a farmer's wife in north-central Sri Lanka.

Jeremiah, the topic for next quarter, written by Imre Tokics, reveals the reality of God's desire for humans to obey Him and the human tendency not to. The book recounts Jeremiah's ministry as he preached God's message to a people who, for the most part, didn't want to hear it.

The book takes us through decades of biblical history as the Lord used Jeremiah to proclaim truths that have been the foundation of the biblical message from the beginning. Of all the spiritual truths taught in the book, these words catch the essence of so much of what the Lord seeks from His people: "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD'" (*Jer. 9:23, 24*). Jeremiah takes a spiritual journey from the lowest depths of human depravity to heights and grandeur and majesty of the Lord, who, from those heights, cries out to all of us in our fallen state.

Lesson 1—The Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Prophets** (*Isa. 1:19, Jer. 11:2–6, Ezek. 18:23*)

MONDAY: **Jeremiah's Family Background** (*Jer. 1:1*)

TUESDAY: **Prophetic Calling of Jeremiah** (*Jer. 1:4, 5*)

WEDNESDAY: **Reluctant Prophets** (*Jer. 1:6*)

THURSDAY: **The Almond Branch** (*Jer. 1:11–19*)

Memory Text—*Jeremiah 1:5, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Despite opposition, Jeremiah could not be sold or bought; he stood as "a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall" (*Jer. 1:18*), not in his own strength but in the Lord's.

Lesson 2—The Crisis (Within and Without)

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **A Quick History** (*Judg. 2:1–15*)

MONDAY: **The Two Kingdoms** (*1 Kings 12:26–31*)

TUESDAY: **Two Evils** (*Jer. 2:1–28*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Babylonian Threat** (*Jer. 27:6*)

THURSDAY: **Swearing Falsely** (*Jer. 7:4*)

Memory Text—*Jeremiah 2:3, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: God's people faced challenges, but their greatest crisis came from within in the sense that the people's hearts had become so hardened and damaged by sin and apostasy that they refused to heed the warnings that God was sending to them.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.