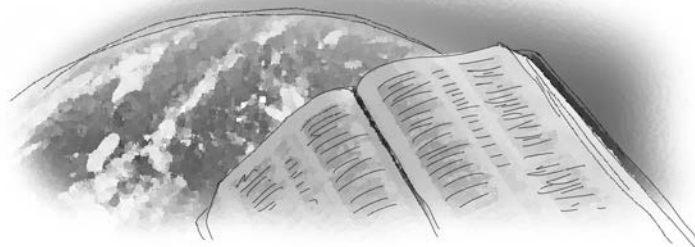


Discipling¹ the Nations



SABBATH—MARCH 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 56:6–8; Matthew 11:20–24; John 12:20–32; Romans 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (Isaiah 56:7, NKJV).

FROM THE TIME IT STARTED, CHRIST'S MESSAGE WAS FOR EVERYONE EVERYWHERE. Early on, the gospel spread worldwide because it is for everyone. Of course, this idea challenged the disciples' thinking. For example, their first reaction to Christ's talk with the Samaritan woman shows this challenge. They thought that Jesus as the Messiah (Chosen One) was the fulfillment (completion) of only the *Jewish* prophecies (special messages from God) and hopes. Somehow they had missed or misunderstood the prophets (special messengers from God). The prophets' messages were for all people. Jesus was for all people. He was not to be limited to one group. Salvation might come from the Jews, but it was for everyone. Christ's followers would rise above national borders, international quarrels, language differences, and other difficulties. This was because He Himself had established the pattern of cross-cultural evangelism (outreach).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we see this call in Revelation 14:6: “I saw another angel. He was flying high in the air. He came to tell everyone on earth the good news that will always be true. He told it to every nation, tribe, language and people” (NIRV).

1. discipling—leading others to Christ.

SUNDAY—MARCH 2**THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS****(Micah 4:1, 2)**

Old Testament prophets made prophecies about the conversion² of non-Jewish people (Gentiles) to a Bible-based faith. False gods, false worship, and destructive ways of life would end. The Gentiles would submit (give) their lives to God. Israel's enemies would stream into Jerusalem begging for more spiritual knowledge. Israel's job was to broadcast God's worldwide invitation to the surrounding nations.

Unfortunately, Israel's missionary³ passion was sidetracked by earthly events. God's grand plan was buried under spiritual laziness. But Christ's coming brought that vision back to life, at least for some people.

Read Isaiah 56:6–8; Micah 4:1, 2; Jonah 3:7–10; and Jonah 4:1. What do these verses teach about worldwide outreach? What do they tell us about how limited some people in Israel were in their understanding of worldwide outreach?

Israel was to be the light of the nations. If heathen (not a Christian) nations saw the wonderful advantages that the Israelites had, they would ask about the Israelites' faith.

Then many of them would worship the true God.

Unfortunately, that is not how things worked out. This is because Israel became so selfish that it lost sight of God's larger purpose. Its people also failed to see that God had offered them so much.

Modern Christians face many of the same challenges. Will they give all they have to push the gospel forward? Or will they become so selfish that they forget their larger purpose? It is easier to fall into this trap than we think.

"In the name of the Lord let us lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving for the results of work all around the world.

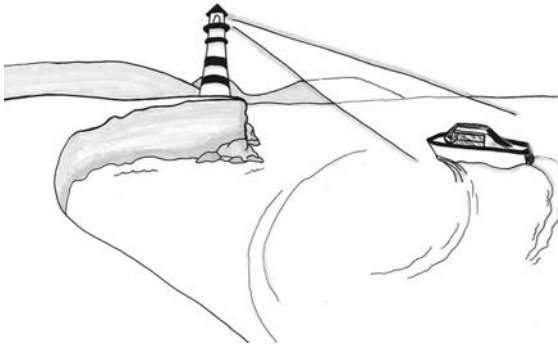
"And still our General [Jesus], who never makes a mistake, says to us: 'Advance. Enter new territory. Lift up the standard [flag] in every land. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory [great honor and praise] of the LORD is risen upon thee" ' [Isaiah 60:1, KJV].

"Our watchword [motto] is to be: Onward, ever onward. The angels of God will go ahead of us to prepare the way. Our responsibility to help others want to live in heaven can never be let go of until the whole earth shall be lightened with the glory of the Lord."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁴ for the Church, volume 6, pages 28, 29.

2. conversion—a change in a person's beliefs and lifestyle for the better.

3. missionary—having to do with the special duty or work that a church sends a person or group out to do.

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.



Israel was to be the light of the nations.

MONDAY—MARCH 3

WOE UNTO THEE! (Matthew 11:20–24)

Read Matthew 11:20–24; Luke 4:25–30; Luke 17:11–19; and John 10:16. What important message comes from these verses? How can we take this message and use it for ourselves in our own time and experience? What principle (important rule) is shown here that we have to be very careful about?

Christ's own people had so many advantages. He wanted them to wake up to what they were called for as a people. He wanted them to see that salvation, even for the chosen nation, was not something that a person is born into. It was not passed on through blood or by a birthright (right by birth). It was, and is, something that a person has to choose to accept. It was a choice that even non-Jews could, and did, make.

Athletic coaches sometimes challenge their athletes by comparing⁵ them

with rival (competing) schools or organizations. A coach might say, "If you would practice as faithfully, energetically, and hard as they do, you would enjoy success." This is because the job of a coach clearly is to build up his or her athletes' desires to succeed rather than crush their hopes of doing so.

In the same way, Jesus wanted His own people to share the fullness of salvation as some non-Jewish people were already doing. No doubt His words made some angry because He preached something that they did not want to hear. But these truths should have already been known and understood by them.

Some people might indeed have many spiritual advantages that others do not have. But those who have these advantages must understand that all that God has given is a gift from Him. And this gift is to be used for His glory (praise) and not their own.

What about us? What about all the advantages that we as a people have been given by God? Why is it important to recognize those advantages and then humbly understand the responsibilities that come with them?

TUESDAY—MARCH 4

"WE WOULD SEE JESUS" (John 12:20–32)

Read John 12:20–32. How do these verses show that the gospel

5. comparing—showing how two or more things are the same or different.

message is for all the world?

Jerusalem is buzzing with rumors. Christ's victorious entry has just taken place. But praise is quickly replaced by questions. What is going to happen next? Will Jesus be crowned king?

Among the crowd attending for Passover are Greek worshipers. Notice their words to Philip: "Sir, we would see Jesus" (verse 21). In other words, they want to see Jesus. They want to be with Him. They want to learn from Him. How deeply that shows the power of Christ's love and His message! How sad, too, that those who should have said those words are the same ones who want to get rid of Jesus.

The Greeks probably asked Philip because he, too, had a Greek name. Philip came from Bethsaida, which was a commercial fishing center and known as a cultural melting pot (full of all kinds of people). Philip probably spoke Greek, too. The verse also suggests that Jesus was not there. Perhaps He worshiped nearby in places reserved for Jews. But, later, Jesus joined His disciples and the Greek interviewers within the outer court. He also gave these Greek men their wish. Notice what He said to them: "If any man"—meaning any man, woman, Jew, Greek, et cetera—wanted to "follow" Him, he or she could, but it would come at a cost.

What was that cost? How do we understand the meaning of this? Read John 12:25.

Then, with these Greek men still present, heaven thunders a supportive message of judgment and victory. That voice is heard, Jesus says, not for Him but for them, Jew and Greek, so that their faith can be made stronger. Christ's words quickly show that His death is to be for all the world.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 5**BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS⁶
(LUKE 10:27–37)**

Read John 7:35; John 8:48; and Luke 10:27–37. How do these verses show why regional, geographical, and racial barriers should not exist among Christians as they go to make disciples among all nations?

Some of the leaders hated Jesus very much. That is sad because the very ones who should have been the first to accept Him and His message were the same ones who fought against Him the hardest. In other words, priests of Israel worked against the Son of God at the same time that non-Jews accepted Him as the Messiah. What a powerful lesson is here for those who think of themselves as good Christians!

6. barriers—"blocks," such as hatred or judgments, that prevent people from working with other kinds of people.



The religious leaders bypassed the wounded man.

When criticizing Christ, the priests labeled Him as having “a devil” (John 8:48). And they made it worse by calling Him a “Samaritan,”⁷ too. They even laughed at Him for His witness among the Greeks. They found it unthinkable that Jesus would consider teaching Greeks. This clearly showed the leaders’ disgust for those not of their own nation and faith. Jesus disagreed by saying that character⁸ is more important than race.

How interesting, too, that Jesus used the true story of a Samaritan. Jesus wanted to teach a powerful spiritual lesson about what it meant to obey truly God’s law. Jewish religious leaders had a twisted understanding of Levitical (from the book of Leviticus) law. So, they passed by the

wounded man. The hated foreigner, a Samaritan, put aside his prejudice⁹ and saved the stranger’s life. What a strong witness against all those who refuse to help someone because the person is not of their same background.

Think of the last time you perhaps did not help someone in need. What excuses did you make for not helping? Looking back now, what should you have done differently?



The hated foreigner, a Samaritan, ignored prejudice by saving the stranger’s life.

THURSDAY—MARCH 6

THE GREAT COMMAND (Romans 15:12)

Read Romans 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8; John 11:52, 53; and Matthew 28:19, 20. What is the important message here? How does this message fit in so well with the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14?

7. Samaritan—a person from Samaria. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the invaders from the north, many Jews intermarried with non-Jews who were among the invaders and settled in an area called Samaria, north of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

8. character—the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a person that make him or her who he or she is.

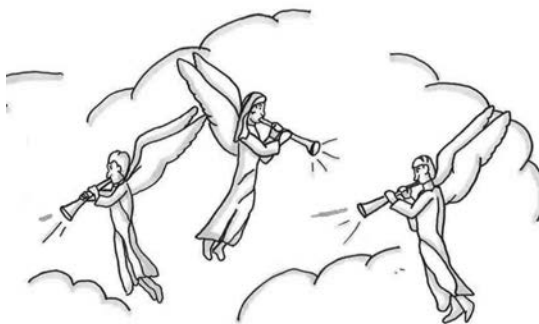
9. prejudice—hating a person because of his or her skin color, religion, or sex; not liking a person because he or she looks different or does things differently.

God's final work will not be finished until the eternal gospel, in the form of the three angels' messages found in Revelation 14, has crossed every racial, national, and geographic boundary line. Without giving the exact time, the Bible states that this gospel will reach around the world. God's victory and its announcement are promised to be made.

The nations' acceptance of that message is prophesied (foretold). This must happen, but who will offer themselves as God's channels of grace?¹⁰ Who will join Christ in overcoming the racial and language barriers that slow down the gospel's progress? Who will empty their wallets and pocketbooks? Who will sacrifice earthly comforts and family relationships so that the gospel work can advance? These are the questions that we all must ask ourselves. What are we doing to reach out to others, whoever they may be and wherever they are? How unfortunate that some believers let racial, social, and cultural prejudices prevent them from strong gospel preaching! Meanwhile, their fellow believers are scattered across the globe, willingly giving up their lives so that the gospel might be preached.

"Our missionary success has depended on our self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. God alone can judge the work done as the gospel message has been preached in clear, straight lines. New fields have been entered, and strong work has been done. The

seeds of truth have been sown. The light has awakened many minds. This brings enlarged views of God and a more correct understanding of the character to be formed. Thousands have been brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. They have been filled with the faith that works by love and makes the soul pure."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 6, page 28.



The three angels' messages cross every racial, national, and geographic boundary.

FRIDAY—MARCH 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "The Great Commission," pages 25–34; "Pentecost," pages 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*; "In the Outer Court," pages 621–626; "The Good Samaritan," pages 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"While on his journey, a certain Samaritan came to where the sufferer was. When the Samaritan saw him, he had mercy on him. He did not question

10. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

whether the stranger was a Jew or a Gentile [non-Jew]. . . .

“So the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean just someone of the church or of the faith to which we belong. It does not mean race, color, or class differences. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by Satan, the enemy. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 503.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What does our financial support of the church’s worldwide mission show about our real dedication (strong support; loyalty) to the gospel command? Why must our sacrifice be more than just financial support? How can funds for the church be used for cross-cultural evangelism (outreach)?
- ❷ “We are not supposed to feel

that the work of the gospel depends only upon the minister [pastor]. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who claims the name of Christ must be a serious, fair-minded worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness [holiness]. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. No matter what God calls us to do, as Christians we have a work in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries [workers for God]. Our chief goal is winning souls to Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 6, page 427. In class, think deeply about the meaning of what is written here. As a class, what more could you do to help to finish the work that we have been called to do?

- ❸ Think deeply about what Jesus says in John 12:25. What does it mean to “hate” our life in this world? How are we to show this “hatred” in our lives and actions?