

Mission¹**SABBATH—JUNE 20**

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 14:6; Ephesians 4:11–15; 2 Peter 2:1–3; Revelation 14:6–12.

MEMORY VERSE: “Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NlrV).

MISSION IS NOT AN OLD-FASHIONED WORD connected with tropical hats and six-year services in far-off places around the world. The word *mission* is a central part of the Christian life. “The words *mission* and *missionary* come from Latin words meaning *send* and *one sent*. . . . The English Bible usually uses the noun *apostle*, which also comes from the Greek word that means one sent. . . . Thirty-nine times the Gospel² of John says that Jesus was sent by God. Thirty-nine times, then, Jesus is defined in that book alone as a Missionary or Apostle.”—Adapted from Jon L. Dybdahl, “Missionary God—Missionary Church,” in *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, edited by Erich W. Baumgartner (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1998), page 8.

We, as followers of Christ, are fellow missionaries with Jesus. As He was sent to this world, so we are sent to represent Him and to preach the three angels' messages to every person. The longer we are here, the greater the danger of our becoming too interested in staying in this world. Then we forget what we are supposed to do to preach to the world the present-truth message that God has given us.

A QUICK LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mission is the heart of the church. The future of people, far and near, is at stake. Mission is not one among many programs of the church. It is the very reason for its life. Each Christian is called to be a missionary.

1. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

2. Gospel—one of the first four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

SUNDAY—JUNE 21**PEOPLE WILL BE LOST,
UNLESS . . . (John 14:6)**

Throughout history, Bible thinkers have argued whether or not God will save all people. Some say God's love guarantees (assures; promises) that no one will be lost. Others say that people who have never heard of Christ will get an opportunity (chance) to come to believe after death. Others again defend different theories (ideas). The problem with theories is that often they try to explain everything. But we must be satisfied with what God has shown to us. There are questions to which we do not know the answers. But we know that He is fair in what He does and, at the same time, limitless in His love. God also has made clear that people have a free will and that it is possible to be lost. In the end, there will be a separation between those who are saved and those who will face eternal (forever) death. And we know also that the gospel³ must be preached to as many people as possible.

What do John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and 1 John 5:11, 12 tell us about the importance of preaching the gospel to the whole world?

John 3:16 is one of the best known verses in the Bible. " 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' " (NIV). The verse speaks about

the love of God, which sent His Son to this earth. It promises eternal life to all who believe in Him. But it also clearly points to the other choice. Those who do not listen to the gospel call and refuse to accept Christ will be destroyed. The decision (choice) as to who will be destroyed and who will receive eternal life is not ours. We may be in for some real surprises when we see the roll call of the saved. Without trying to control people's will, God will do everything possible to lessen the number of those who will be destroyed. In His wisdom, God has given us a part in this work.

What is your own role in the church's mission? How seriously do you take the call to reach others with the gospel? What more could you do?

MONDAY—JUNE 22**THE GREAT COMMAND
(Matthew 28:19, 20)**

The command to take the gospel to the entire world is found in all four Gospels. It is in the book of Acts too. They show clear comparisons, but there are also some interesting differences. One needs to read all versions to form a complete picture of everything that is suggested in the "Great Command."

The "Great Command" is recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 20:21; and

3. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

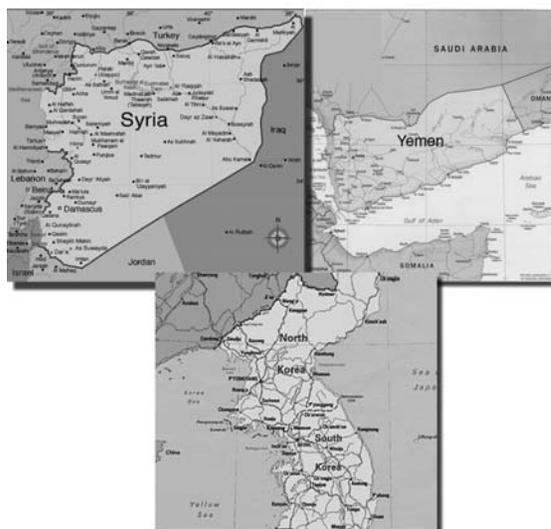
Acts 1:8. Note how these verses support each other. What are the details in each of these verses?



We are commanded to take the gospel to the entire world.

The gospel is to be preached “to all nations.” According to General Conference figures, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now preaching its message in more than 200 countries. This means that there are only a few countries where our church is not there. Among these are several large ones: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. Most of the others are small, with less than one million people. So, one would be tempted to conclude that the Adventist Church almost has “finished the work.” But that would be false. We must give thanks to our Lord that our church continues to grow fast in many parts of the world and that many new places are being entered. But the

challenge is still great. When the New Testament speaks about “nations,” it uses a word that means “people groups” or “geographic groups.” So, our work is not finished until all people groups have been reached. There is some argument about how many such *people groups* there are. The number quoted by experts is between some 12,000 to more than 20,000. It depends on the description one uses. But whatever description is used, several thousand of these people groups have not yet been reached.



Our church still needs to take the gospel into such places as North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

Think about all the unreached people in your own community. What difference has your life made in reaching them? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your part in the missionary work of the church?

TUESDAY—JUNE 23**A WITNESSING CHURCH
(Revelation 14:6–12)**

According to Revelation 14:6–12, what special message is to be preached by God’s people in the time of the end? What is your understanding of that message? Write it in your own words.

The verses about the messages of the three angels is found in a theme (idea; topic) that focuses on the end of time. It starts with a vision of the “first-fruits” (verse 4) of saved people. Then a vision of the “harvest” of all saved people follows (verse 15). It is important to know what these messages include. But also we need to understand who these “angels” who bring this “eternal gospel” (verse 6, NIV) are. The word *angel* in prophecy is a symbol for human⁴ messengers, leaders, and church members. Ellen G. White supports this view: “The angels are represented as flying in the midst of heaven. They are preaching a message of warning to the people living in the last days of this earth’s history. No one hears the voice of these angels, for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working with heaven. Men and women are given light by the Spirit of God, and sanctified [made holy] through the truth. They preach the three messages in their order.”—Adapted from *Life Sketches*, page 429.

4. human—having to do with men, women, or children.

5. witness—to tell other people about God through your words and the loving deeds you do for them.



The three angels represent church members who warn the world to get ready for Jesus’ return.

Just as in the “Great Command,” we find in the opening statement of the three angels’ messages a strong challenge to take the gospel to every person on earth. Yet, we face a great danger. This danger is that when we are here longer, we become less mission-minded (dedicated to doing God’s work) and become more interested in keeping things the way they are. We are forgetting that our mission is to witness⁵ to the world. When that happens to us or the churches, then we are losing the reason for our mission.

Think about this problem, that of focusing more on self-protection than on mission. How does this happen? How can we recognize when it does? And what can we do to keep from falling into this trap?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 24**PERSONAL WITNESS
(1 Corinthians 12:28)**

It is not so hard to agree that the church must be mission-minded. But who is the church? The church is more than an organization.⁶ Instead, it is people who are called to be witnesses.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11–15, why should we be bold in believing that we can be witnesses of our faith?

Not all of us have the gift of preaching or teaching. But we all have been gifted in some way so that we can be what we are called to be—disciples (followers) always prepared to talk about the hope that is ours (1 Peter 3:15).

According to John 14:26; Acts 1:4–8; and Acts 2:1–4, what is the greatest gift for those who are willing to witness of their faith?

Christ has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His followers. Being able to receive spiritual (holy; from God) gifts does not mean that we do not have to make any preparations or to undertake any training. The apostles were disciples who for more than three years had gone through the heaviest training possible. In the same way, disciples today must be serious about receiving training for Christian witness. And the church must be responsible for preparing training materials and members for

their work. But training alone will not be enough. God's people today need the leading of the Holy Spirit if they want to be successful in their outreach to others.

One simple truth, however, will always remain: you cannot give what you do not have. We need to make sure that we have a living relationship with God, or we cannot hope to lead others to that same experience.



We need to have a living relationship with Jesus before we can lead others to Him.

What does 2 Peter 3:18 say is an important requirement for all who want to be witnesses of their faith?

A church that responds to its calling will be a growing church. But growth should not be limited to growing numbers. As groups and individuals, we must be “growing in grace”⁷ if our witnessing truly is to work well.

How do you understand what it

6. organization—the leaders who oversee the members and business of a large group of people, such as a worldwide church.

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

means to grow in grace? How can you tell if you are? How do you test yourself? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.

THURSDAY—JUNE 25

SHARING THE LORD (Titus 2:1)

In sharing the message of the crucified (put to death on a cross) and risen Christ, we must be able to give a faithful teaching of the important truths that God has shown in His Word.

According to Titus 2:1 and 2 Peter 2:1–3, how important is it to teach and follow sound doctrines?⁸

We believe in the God of the Bible and have decided to follow Christ. Then we will want to know as much as we can about Him, about His character,⁹ and about what He expects from us. We also try to summarize what we learn in the Bible in a series of doctrines and teachings. To some people, doctrine is not necessary. That is a sad misunderstanding. Without sound doctrines, our faith soon will become unfocused and weak. Rather than growing in our faith, we will discover that our faith becomes less and less meaningful. Unsound doctrines often will point us away from Christ, to ourselves or to

something else that can fool us into thinking that we are saved. When we fail to ground our faith in sound biblical teaching, we are in serious danger of falling apart from the center of our faith: Jesus Christ our Lord.

What does 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 1 Corinthians 2:2 say is to be the centerpiece of all our preaching and witnessing?

Sound doctrine must be strengthened by the firm belief in Jesus Christ. Everything we believe and say as doctrine must be related to Jesus, who gives us our eternal salvation.¹⁰ If there is no connection with Jesus Christ, a doctrine will be no more than a piece of information, which may be interesting but is nothing more. But if rooted in Jesus Christ, a doctrine will help us better understand the plan of salvation and will make our relationship with our Lord much better.

Think about some of the false teachings that appear in the Christian world: eternal suffering in hell; the belief that some people are already saved and others are already lost; the belief that Jesus Christ was not God but just a great man. How could these and other false teachings negatively influence¹¹ our understanding of God and the plan of salvation?

8. doctrines—church beliefs.

9. character—who God is; God's Ten Commandments make known to us who God is.

10. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

11. influence—to have power or an effect over persons or things.

FRIDAY—JUNE 26

ADDITIONAL STUDY: For different parts of the mission challenge for Seventh-day Adventists, read Jon L. Dybdahl, editor, *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1999). Read also Ellen G. White, “God’s Purpose for His Church,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 9–16.

“The church is God’s chosen organization for saving people. It was organized [created] for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan to show His greatness to the world through His church. God has called the members of the church out of darkness into His marvelous light. They are to show forth His glory [power and praise]. The church is the “bank” of the riches of the grace of Christ. And the church will show to the worlds in the entire universe¹² and the angels in heaven the final and full display [show] of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 9.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As a class, talk over your answer to the final question on Wednesday. What are the different understand-

ings of what it means to grow in grace?

❷ Assess (think deeply about) your local church. Where is the main drive? Is it on the church itself and ministering to (helping meet) the needs of the church group itself? Or is it on mission and on witnessing? How do we strike the right balance? How do we disciple (teach) those who have joined us, while at the same time not neglecting the call to reach all people? Where does your church stand on this topic? In what ways can you help the church improve where it needs to?

❸ How do we as a church protect ourselves from many of the dangerous religious ideas that pollute our teachings? At the same time, how do we remain open to growing and advancing in new light that can help us better understand our Lord and our mission?

SUMMARY: The gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached in all the world. This is the responsibility (duty) of all who call themselves disciples. All of us have received spiritual gifts. And all of us have the promise of the Spirit to empower us. The preaching of the gospel should be based on sound doctrine. But everything we preach must be rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

12. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

