

God's Call *to* Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 11:1–9, Gen. 12:1–3, Dan. 9:24–27, Matt. 1:21, Gen. 12:10–13:1, Acts 8:1–4, Acts 1:8.*

Memory Text: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

God can sometimes move us out of our comfort zone and make us His witnesses. Sometimes this change can be used to accomplish His purposes, such as in the example of the dispersing of the people at the Tower of Babel. “This dispersion was the means of peopling the earth, and thus the Lord’s purpose was accomplished through the very means that men had employed to prevent its fulfillment.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 120. Abraham, meanwhile, went from his home country to another (*Genesis 12*) as a means of witness. The disciples of Jesus went from working among only their own people (*Acts 3*) to working for others, as well (*Acts 8:1–4*). In *Acts 1:8*, Jesus laid down a principle of evangelism: they would start locally, Jerusalem and Judea, then go to Samaria and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth.

But even if we do not leave our country, God still wants us to reach out to the people around us. When the church in Jerusalem was becoming complacent, its members were dispersed. Though persecution came and people suffered, these unfortunate events became a means of spreading the good news all over the world.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 21.

Moving Beyond Our Comfort Zone

In order to reach others, God intends for us to move beyond our comfort zone. The desire to remain only with our own ilk and ethnic or social kind can lead to selfishness, even evil. This danger is one of the lessons derived from the story of Babel.

Read Genesis 11:1–9. What were the intentions of the people? What were they wanting to do, and why would God thwart it?

This story of the people at the Tower of Babel reveals their great ambition. They were planning to make a monumental structure—a city and a tower such as existed nowhere else in the world: “a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (*Gen. 11:4, NIV*).

How often today do people seek to do the same? Whether through politics, art, business, even religion, it doesn’t matter. There are those who want to make a great name for themselves. In the end, how futile and meaningless their endeavors are. (*See Eccles. 2:1–11.*)

The Bible says in Genesis 11:4 that these people wanted to build the tower so that they would avoid being scattered over the face of the earth. They wanted to stick together for their own selfish reasons. But God had another plan.

These people were also united for this work. But “the LORD said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’ ” (*Gen. 11:6, NIV*). This ambitious plan of the people was, in fact, evil.

Though Scripture does not say it explicitly, Ellen White says that they didn’t trust God’s promise that He would never destroy the earth with water again (*Gen. 9:14, 15*). They intended to build for their own perceived safety rather than to trust God’s Word. Whatever their ultimate motives, God knew that their intentions were not pure but were filled with selfish ambition, and so He prevented them from achieving their stated goals.

Are you part of a group or ethnic community that is more comfortable among themselves? In what ways may you possibly engage with others who are not part of your race, ethnicity, or nationality?

Becoming a Blessing to the Whole World

Read Genesis 12:1–3. In what way was God’s instruction to Abram a call to mission?

God asked Abram (whose name He later changed to Abraham) to leave his country and his people and go to another land. It was all part of God’s plan to use Abraham as a vehicle to fulfill His divine purposes in the earth. And Abraham went, according to the Word of the Lord. If God has a plan for you, it may be a call for you to leave your extended family and your people and go to a place that He is opening up for you to serve Him, in order that you can be a blessing to others.

Read the following texts. What does each text tell of God’s covenant, His promise to us?

Gen. 3:15 _____

Gen. 17:19 _____

Num. 24:17 _____

Isa. 9:6 _____

Dan. 9:24–27 _____

Matt. 1:21 _____

From the above texts, it is clear that God was going to accomplish the promise, made in the Garden of Eden, that Someone will come as a solution to the sin problem. This solution, Jesus Christ the Messiah, was to arise from the line of Abraham and Isaac (through Sarah). Hebrews 11:9 states that Isaac and Jacob were heirs to the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham.

We don’t know exactly how much Abraham himself knew or understood of just how the promised Seed would arise through him, but he moved out in faith anyway. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (*Heb. 11:8, NKJV*).

What an example to us!

Suppose you are called by God to go, “not knowing” where you are going. How do you respond, and why?

Abraham's Call

Following the call of God, Abraham entered the land as God had commanded him. However, right from the start, things didn't seem to go too well for him. He arrived where God told him to go, but according to the Bible, "the Canaanites were then in the land" (*Gen. 12:6, NKJV*)—pagans known for their cruelty and violence. No wonder that right after Abraham got there, the Lord appeared to him and said, "To your descendants I will give this land" (*Gen. 12:7, NKJV*). No doubt Abraham needed the encouragement.

However, things *still* didn't go particularly well for him, at least at first.

Read Genesis 12:10–13:1. What things happened to him next, and what mistakes did this man of God make?

How discouraging it must have been for him: leaving a comfortable and most likely prosperous existence in the homeland, only to go, "not knowing where he was going" (*Heb. 11:8, NKJV*). And one of the first things he faced was a famine! This famine was so bad that he had to leave the place he had been told by God to settle in and go somewhere else. And then things got even worse after that.

"During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection. In concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, he betrayed a distrust of the divine care, a lack of that lofty faith and courage so often and nobly exemplified in his life. . . . Through Abraham's lack of faith, Sarah was placed in great peril. The king of Egypt, being informed of her beauty, caused her to be taken to his palace, intending to make her his wife. But the Lord, in His great mercy, protected Sarah by sending judgments upon the royal household."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 130.

No one has ever said mission work was easy, and by lying, by being deceitful, Abraham only made matters worse. Fortunately, God is a God of patience, and He didn't cast off His servant for his mistake, which, unfortunately, would not be the only one Abraham would make. How comforting to know that even despite our errors, if we cling to the Lord in faith and submission, as did Abraham, not only can our errors, sins, and faults be forgiven, but the Lord can still use us for mission.

What lessons can we take from the story about Abram in Egypt?

The Early Church and Comfort Zones

Read Acts 8:1–4. In the early church, what brought about the scattering of believers beyond their comfort zone?

Until this time, the early church was mainly in Jerusalem (or within the Jewish territory and among the Jewish people). When persecution began—in which Saul, a devout Jew and a Pharisee, was actively involved—the church in Jerusalem was then dispersed all over Judea and Samaria. Jesus had predicted in Acts 1:8 that “ ‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria’ ” (*NIV*). This statement was fulfilled, as noted in Acts 8:4, that “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (*NIV*).

Even after the church began to move out beyond Jerusalem, the believers were still preaching in the regions of the Jews or in the neighborhoods of the Jewish people in other cities. Acts 11:19 indicates that the believers were dispersed all the way to Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Cyprus, but they did not at this stage preach the message to anyone other than the Jews alone. The disciples of Jesus and the early church did not intend to see the Gentiles, but only Jews, come to the Lord. They still had very narrow views on what the mission of the church was to be.

Peter, a disciple of Jesus and one of the leading figures of the early church, was averse to taking the gospel message to the Gentiles, even after Paul had begun to do so. Peter was known as an apostle to the circumcised (meaning the Jews), and Paul an apostle to the Gentiles (*Gal. 2:8*). Early on, Peter did not even want to be seen with the Gentiles (*Gal. 2:11, 12*). However, God moved Peter out of his comfort zone and changed his heart. He was starting to learn about what the gospel commission really entailed and what Jesus’ death was meant to accomplish for the whole world.

Read Acts 10:9–15, 28, 29. What was the message that the Lord was giving to Peter, and how must we, in our day and age, apply this principle to the work of mission?

Starting From Where You Are

Read Acts 1:8. What principle did Jesus present when doing the work of sharing or being His witnesses to the world?

This is the principle set out by Jesus that shows us how we need to act as His disciples, who have the good news to share with others. Sharing the truth is not about convincing others how wrong they are, but about sharing Jesus as portrayed in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12.

There are, however, some principles in the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8.

First, “ ‘you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem’ ” (*NIV*). As we have seen (but it is worth repeating), we are to be His witnesses in the place where we physically reside. This may include our own home, our church, our neighborhood, and our community. We need to be His witnesses first where we are, in the area He has initially placed us—home or work—and to be His witnesses to the people closest to us. It can be close family or extended family, church people, work colleagues, neighbors, and the community.

Sometimes people are interested only in going off to a far country and alien culture to be God's witnesses. But they do not witness to people around them now. We should begin where we are and move from there as the Lord leads us.

Next, “ ‘in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NIV*). Again, Jesus affirms the reality that witnessing involves crossing cultural boundaries. Beginning from where we are, we may be called to move to other areas to reach out to different social, ethnic, and religious groups. If I belong to a certain ethnic or language people group, it may be much easier for me to witness to them because of minimal cultural barriers to cross. In some areas of the world, only one clan or tribe is represented in the makeup of the church. However, Jesus' great commission tells us that as His witnesses, moving out of our comfort zone and investing our resources for such people groups is crucial. They also need the message of Jesus.

Challenge: Identify and make a list of people groups with special needs in your community, whom the church has not made efforts to reach.

Challenge Up: Begin praying for an opportunity in the near future to become engaged in mission to people with special needs.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34, and “A Seeker for Truth,” pp. 131–142, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Before ascending to heaven, Christ gave His disciples their commission. He told them that they were to be the executors of the will in which He bequeathed to the world the treasures of eternal life. You have been witnesses of My life of sacrifice in behalf of the world, He said to them. You have seen My labors for Israel. And although My people would not come to Me that they might have life, although priests and rulers have done unto Me as they listed, although they have rejected Me, they shall have still another opportunity of accepting the Son of God. You have seen that all who come to Me confessing their sins, I freely receive. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. To you, My disciples, I commit this message of mercy. It is to be given to both Jews and Gentiles—to Israel, first, and then to all nations, tongues, and peoples. All who believe are to be gathered into one church.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 27, 28.

The Great Commission is clear: “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*). Therefore, it is definitely about going to others, especially other nations.

“The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ’s kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

“There are in our world many who are nearer the kingdom of God than we suppose. In this dark world of sin the Lord has many precious jewels, to whom He will guide His messengers. Everywhere there are those who will take their stand for Christ. Many will prize the wisdom of God above any earthly advantage, and will become faithful light bearers. . . . Convinced that Peter’s course was in direct fulfillment of the plan of God, and that their prejudices and exclusiveness were utterly contrary to the spirit of the gospel, they glorified God, saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.’ Thus, without controversy, prejudice was broken down, the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages was abandoned, and the way was opened for the gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 140–142.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How would you define the word *mission* as you apply it to your own life?
- 2 In what ways could you, daily, express mission in your attitude and behavior? How can you be more mission minded in your daily tasks?
- 3 How important is it that we examine our hearts and seek power from above to be purged from prejudice against those unlike us?

Desperate for a Mission Story

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Gina Wahlen was excited to visit a house church in a country where Christians face persecution for their faithfulness to God. She had arrived to collect mission stories for Adventist Mission.

The house church turned out to be a former home on the ground floor of an apartment building. The apartment had been gutted and turned into a church with a main sanctuary on one side and a small room on the other. Gina began interviewing people in the small side room with an interpreter.

The people were earnest and kind. But they didn't seem to have any special stories, speaking instead about the technical aspects of a house church.

As time passed, Gina grew desperate. This was the only place where she had planned to collect stories in the country. "Dear Lord, please help me to find someone who has an inspiring story," she prayed. "I don't know how to find anyone because I don't speak the language, and I don't think that the interpreter can help. So, Lord, would You please send someone?"

Soon afterward, a woman stepped into the room. Gina felt impressed to speak with her and struck up a conversation through the interpreter.

"Have you been coming to this church for long?" Gina asked.

No, the woman hadn't. She had been coming for only a few months.

Gina asked how she had learned about Seventh-day Adventists.

The woman said she had been walking with her children to the market on a Saturday. As they walked along the sidewalk, two neatly dressed men approached.

"The seventh day is the Sabbath," said one.

"To learn more, look on the internet," said the other. Then the men kept walking.

The woman went home and searched online. Somehow, she found a series of Adventist presentations by a U.S. evangelist that had been dubbed into her language. She watched many programs and was greatly blessed.

Then, she somehow found the house church. She showed up, prepared for baptism, and was baptized shortly before Gina's arrival. "I was amazed when I heard her story and was so delighted that God answered my prayer in such a beautiful way," Gina said.



Gina Wahlen served as Mission quarterlies editor at Adventist Mission for three years. Currently, she works as editor and project manager for the Office of the General Conference President. The house church featured in this mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

In the previous two lessons, we have seen that mission is, first and foremost, rooted in the work of God. God's mission is the impetus for all other forms of mission if they are to be successful. This week the focus moves from God's mission to humanity's call to partner with God in sharing His love with the broader world. While the focus is on the human aspect of mission, all that follows should be read in light of the previous two weeks, which focus on God's missiological initiative and intent.

Scripture has numerous stories and passages that illuminate God's active call to human beings as His partners to share in the blessings He desires all humanity to experience. This week, we will explore several such instances. All the examples found in this week's portion must be read in light of God's original Creation design found in Genesis 1–2, summarized most succinctly in Genesis 1:26–28. Even after the Fall, God's original intentions for humanity remained the same, but His implementation of those intentions changed because of the relational breakdowns that were a result of Adam and Eve's choice. Now, in addition to God's original desire, there was a need for a plan of Redemption. This plan started in the Old Testament; was fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; and was shared, throughout the rest of the New Testament, by the followers of Jesus.

Part II: Commentary

When God created the earth and placed humanity within the newly created world, God shared an original intention with Adam and Eve. They were called to watch over the earth, including all the living creatures, and to be fruitful and multiply (*Gen. 1:26–28*). Implicit within this injunction, through the constant refrain of “good” during the Creation week, is the notion that God placed humanity in a world surrounded by wonderful things. To learn about these things and live within this world would lead to flourishing and abundance. God was intimately involved in the ongoing life of earth; God's practice was to walk in the Garden of Eden periodically (*Gen. 3:8*). The first humans were given substantial freedom to live out their God-given functionalities in creative ways. This enterprise was the original mission call from God to humanity.

After the fall of humanity and the entrance of sin into the realities of this earth, things changed. But the changes did not negate the original call of God to humanity. Repeatedly, God reminds those willing to listen

that they are to be fruitful and multiply and take care of the earth (*Gen. 9:1; Gen. 15:4, 5; Gen. 22:17, 18; Gen. 35:11*). The Bible repeats this theme from beginning to end, culminating in a re-created earth found in Revelation 21–22.

Sin, however, ushered in the necessity of a salvific plan that would make it possible for humanity to be able to fully live the life God intended. Redemption was demonstrated to humanity through the ritual of sacrifice. As Adam and Eve shared this plan with succeeding generations, they included the sacrificial act as part of revealing the scope of what God would do to rescue fallen humans. While many probably struggled to grasp how Redemption would work, some could see that God had a plan that brought hope. This plan would become part of the call of God for humanity to share with the world. God's plan would make it possible for humans to live the reality He originally intended for them in Eden.

The Call of Abraham (*Genesis 12:1–3*)

This week's lesson highlights the call of God to Abraham, found in Genesis 12:1–3. The call has several vital elements that need to be understood if we are to fully grasp what the call of God for mission has been, currently is, and will continue to be. First off, the call is rooted in the Genesis 1:26–28 narrative. This connection is most clearly articulated in Isaiah's reference to the call of Abraham and Sarah to share the joy of Eden with the world (*Isa. 51:1–3*). When God called Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, the divine call implied that the blessing entailed sharing a way of life, expressed through profound freedom and creativity, intended by God from the beginning. A quick read of Genesis 12:1–3 makes it difficult to fully grasp the blessing, but its meaning becomes clearer when read within the broader corpus of Scripture. Genesis 22 adds additional detail to what Abraham was called to share, namely, the plan of God to provide a Substitute for humanity through death and subsequent resurrection. This plan gave humanity hope that the effects of sin and death could be overcome. It also gave hope that the promises of Genesis 1:26–28 could be fully realized again in the future.

Another element of the call to Abraham that is overlooked is found in Genesis 12:1–3. Abraham was called to bless the nations. We are called to do the same. We often fail to note that the nations also would bless Abraham (*Gen. 12:3a*). God's call to mission always implies a two-way blessing. Those who follow God must be prepared to receive a blessing from the broader world around them, as well. The call to mission is always a call to bless and be blessed. Understanding this dynamic changes the called person's, or persons', attitude toward others and

changes one's approach to sharing the good news. We will explore this theme more next week.

When we read Scripture, a noticeable trend flows throughout both Testaments. The trend is that God had to remind humanity periodically of the original call in Genesis. The need for a reminder resulted from two things: (1) often God's followers forgot what God called them to do, and (2) changing times required reinforcements of their calling. That is, the overall point to God's call needs to be contextualized, from time to time, but the call itself remains essentially the same.

Space does not allow for a full exploration of all the subsequent reminders of God's call to mission throughout the Bible, but a few can serve as examples. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness, God explicitly reminded His people that, as a nation, they were called to serve all other nations as priests (*Exod. 19:4–6*); in other words, Israel was called to be a blessing to the nations around them and to receive blessings from them. Solomon repeated the call in his dedicatory prayer for the newly built temple (*1 Kings 8:41–43*). The prophets of both Israel and Judah repeated this call in various ways, as can be seen in Isaiah 19:23–25 and Micah 4:2–5. After the Israelites returned from exile, God again reminded them of this call through the prophet Zechariah (*Zech. 8:20–23*).

Jesus lived out the call and demonstrated it, ultimately leading to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. After spending a few years with Jesus and witnessing His resurrection, the disciples were called in the same way that Abraham and then Israel had been called, as we read in Matthew 28:18–20. The apostle Paul also recognized that his calling was rooted in the same call as that given to Abraham, as he states explicitly in his letter to the followers of Jesus in Galatia (*Gal. 3:8, 9, 14*). The last time the call is given in Scripture is found in Revelation 14:6, which is not a new call but rather simply a reiteration of the call that started in Genesis 1:26–28 and was carried forward throughout history. We believe that this final call is for those of us living during this time in the last days of earth's history.

Thus, the call to live and flourish, as God intended in the Garden of Eden, is our call today. We have hope that living the calling and flourishing is possible because of what Jesus did on earth and does for us now in heaven. It is a privilege to partner with God in this calling and to go out intentionally into the wider world with a blessing to share, while also expecting to receive a blessing from those we meet.

Part III: Life Application

Often when people hear or preach on the call to mission, they reduce that call to sharing the good news as a form of information. There is no doubt that part of sharing the blessing first introduced to humanity in the Garden and carried forward through many conduits in history involves sharing information. But the call is so much more than that.

When we recognize that the call of God to us, as humans, is rooted in Genesis 1:26–28, this understanding can lead us, through our various talents and skills, to draw people toward the blessing of flourishing that God intends for us. Our witness to others should be combined with sharing the plan of salvation, but, ultimately, the life that salvation makes possible will give meaning to the call God has given us. Therefore, our call is to live out the blessings of God in such a way that people see and desire what we have in God. This idea means that your workplace, your home, and your circle of friends are the primary locations where you live out the call of God. While preaching and handing out literature have their place, the primary fulfillment of the call to Abraham and you also includes how you live out your daily life in intentionality with others who have not surrendered to Jesus, or have not had the privilege yet of meeting Him. But remember that the call of God is a twofold blessing. As you live out the call in your daily life, expect and look for blessings to come back toward you from people whom you may not even expect.

Notes
