

Mission to the Unreached: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 11:1–6; Matt. 4:23–25; Matt. 15:22–28; Mark 7:24–30; Acts 10:34, 35; Matt. 8:10, 13.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour” (*Matthew 15:28, NKJV*).

From the beginning, a loving God sought His lost children (*Gen. 3:9*); and, to our day, this same loving God is still seeking to reach the lost (*see Rev. 14:6–12*), including the lost in the cities. In 2018, the United Nations published its latest findings, which say that 55 percent of the planet's population lives in urban areas, and this will grow (if time should last) to 68 percent by 2050. We have no choice: we must witness to those in the cities.

Yet, many of God's people act as Jonah did when called to witness to a city: for whatever reason, they flee from the task. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NKJV*). That includes what was written about Jonah.

When here, Jesus ministered not only to those in the cities of Israel but to those in foreign regions, as well; that is, to those outside of the Jewish nation and the chosen people.

This week we will study the Bible story of Christ's mission to Tyre and Sidon and draw lessons to apply to our lives today.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 16.

Mission to Regions Beyond

We read that Jesus took His disciples from Gennesaret (*Matt. 14:34*) “and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon” (*Matt. 15:21, NKJV*). Why did He take them from Galilee to these pagan places? He leads His disciples on this field trip into the borders of these foreign regions so that they can learn, on location, what they could not learn so easily in Galilee. He wanted to teach His disciples lessons that would help prepare them for their calling to reach all people groups, including urbanites.

Read Judges 3:1–6, 1 Kings 5:1–12, and 1 Kings 11:1–6. How do these texts help us understand a bit of the background of these cities?

From Judges 3:1–6, we see that these ancient peoples were used by God to test the Israelites’ faith. Unfortunately, God’s people failed that test, too, at least in this instance: “And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods” (*Judg. 3:6, NKJV*). Thus, right from the start, these people were a stumbling block to Israel.

In 1 Kings 5:1–11, we can see the close relationship between the Sidonians and the Hebrews. Though on one level, the economic ties were mutually beneficial, no doubt the Hebrews were still negatively influenced by the paganism and idolatry of their trading partners.

1 Kings 11:1–6 reveals just how negative that influence eventually became: King Solomon married Sidonian princesses, who led him astray. “For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians” (*1 Kings 11:5, NKJV*).

Yet, despite the history of paganism and idolatry, and their negative influence on the chosen nation, Jesus still brought His disciples to these places. In this way He initiated them in cross-cultural urban mission, confronting their bias and bigotry, and modeled for His followers wholistic urban mission to all cultures and nationalities.

Many challenges face the Adventist urban missionary, among them include health and environmental concerns. Others would include the high cost of living, racism, bigotry, nationalism, and constraints on religious freedom and expression. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, we must work for the cities.

What can you do to help those involved in urban ministry?

Seeking the Multitudes

Despite challenges, external and internal, Jesus graciously extends the call to us for His mission to the cities.

Read Matthew 9:35–38. What does this teach us about mission to the multitudes, wherever we find them?

Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitudes, such as are found in cities. Luke 19:41 describes how Jesus wept over Jerusalem. We may not understand the depths of Jesus' love for His children, even for the “faceless masses” living in cities. This is why in Matthew 9:38 Jesus tells us to pray, so that our motives and hearts can be like His.

Read Matthew 4:23–25. As Jesus began His ministry, from what geographic locations did the people come?

In Matthew 4:25, the multitudes following Jesus came from Galilee, from the ten city-states of the Decapolis to the east, from Jerusalem, and from Judea to the south. Besides Samaria, what region was missing? The coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, part of Phoenicia, along the Mediterranean Sea and northwest of Galilee. We now see why Jesus went to this area! This trip to the region of Tyre and Sidon was one of Jesus' cross-cultural mission trips.

“After the encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus withdrew from Capernaum, and crossing Galilee, repaired to the hill country on the borders of Phoenicia. Looking westward, He could see, spread out upon the plain below, the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, with their heathen temples, their magnificent palaces and marts of trade, and the harbors filled with shipping.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 399.

How can we help people see just how futile, in and of themselves, “their magnificent palaces and marts of trade” are, and why they need Jesus?

In Tyre and Sidon

Bible scholars believe that the Gospel of Matthew had been written specifically for a Jewish audience, and that Mark was written with primarily a Gentile audience in mind. It is helpful to keep this distinction before us as we study the Gospels.

Read Matthew 15:22–28 and Mark 7:24–30. What differences do you see in how the woman was depicted?

Notice how Matthew describes this mother using her nationality or race: Canaanite. Mark is led by the Holy Spirit to use additional terms to describe this mother as “a Greek” or “a Gentile” and then gives additional information: “a Syro-Phoenician by birth” or “a Syrian of Phoenicia”—the only time that this term is used in the Bible.

Consider how this story in Matthew 15 would impact the intended primary audience with their background and worldview. Matthew’s audience would see this mother as a despised heathen. This comes from the Jewish people’s historical experience with the Canaanites as an idol-worshipping people group whose evil lifestyle and practices had long been a stumbling block to their nation. Even Christ’s disciples did not consider the possibility that this woman had faith and was part of the kingdom of God!

In Mark 7, Mark’s audience of Gentiles would have a different response from that of Matthew’s. The Gentiles did not have the same experience as the Jews did with the Canaanites. Instead, the Gentiles would identify with this woman, “a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth” (*NKJV*). Jesus healed one of their own! For the Gentiles, this woman would be regarded as a beloved mother who was concerned about the fate of her daughter and wanted the Master to heal her, regardless of this mother’s ethnic and national background.

“Christ did not immediately reply to the woman’s request. He received this representative of a despised race as the Jews would have done. In this He designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold and heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case, as evinced by His reception of the woman, and the compassionate manner in which He would have them deal with such distress, as manifested by His subsequent granting of her petition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 400.

Read 1 John 2:2. What should this text tell us about how we are all the same before God?

“Send Her Away!”

In the unreached neighborhood of the cities, there are many who long for hope. During Christ’s time, what prevented God’s people from bringing hope of the Messiah to such foreign cities as Tyre and Sidon? Nationalism, pride, and prejudice blinded God’s people to the opportunities to see those nearest to them who longed for the hope foretold by the prophecies of the First Advent. Today in the cities, there are many population groups with whom Jesus Christ wants His people to share the “blessed hope” of the Second Advent (*Titus 2:13*). And just as Jesus didn’t care what their nationality or race was, neither should we.

Read Acts 10:9–16, 28, 34, 35. How would you summarize the lesson taught here by the Holy Spirit?

While waiting for lunch, Peter was given a vision of a rooftop buffet complete with a tablecloth filled with unclean animals and birds. Three times he was told in this vision to get up and eat. God used these visions to confront Peter’s religious pride and bigotry against the Gentiles. Peter eventually understood this truth: “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ ” (*Acts 10:34, 35, NKJV*).

With this background, let’s reflect on our story for lessons from Tyre and Sidon. Look again at Jesus and His interaction with the mother. What lessons did the disciples learn from this field trip that related also to Peter’s vision? How can we apply these to our lives today and to Christ’s last-day call to His mission to the cities? What biases prevent us from seeing the needs of urbanites? What opportunities has God provided to us in the cities—to expand our mission understanding, and caringly to confront our bigotry, nationalism, and spiritual pride?

Jesus patiently taught His disciples, who did not yet fully understand that God’s great plan of salvation was for the entire human family, not just one nation or rural ethnic group. The Holy Spirit can help us to overcome our prejudice and bias in order to complete our mission to the cities.

Read Galatians 2:11–13. What should this teach us about how hard it can be to be purged of the prejudices we have been taught since childhood?

Faith on Earth?

In Luke 18:8, Jesus asks this question at the end of one of His parables: “ ‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’ ” (*NKJV*). As Christ’s disciples today, we need to see what Jesus is looking for. In this story, we can see that Jesus is looking for faith that shines even amid darkness.

Read Matthew 8:10, 13; Matthew 9:2; Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 2:5; Mark 10:46–52; and Luke 18:35–43. In these passages, whom does Jesus describe as having faith?

This list includes people with faith that shone even in dark cities. In Capernaum, Jesus highlights several people with faith. In Matthew 8:10, 13, we see a converted pagan centurion with great faith. We meet four faith-filled friends who ripped up the roof to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (*Matt. 9:2, Mark 2:5*). In Mark 10, we meet the former blind man, Bartimaeus, whose faith shines bright in Jericho.

At the same time, we would expect that among God’s people there would be great faith. Yet, even in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth, little faith—or even outright unbelief—was the limiting factor to Christ’s ministry. Among His disciples, several times Jesus says of Israel, “O ye [thou] of little faith!” (*Matt. 6:30, Matt. 8:26, Matt. 14:31, Matt. 16:8*). And in Matthew 17:17, Jesus exclaims, “O faithless and perverse generation”!

One lesson that we can apply to today is that faith is found in unexpected places: in the cities among foreigners, pagans, and people with different religions. In humility, we must go into the cities as Jesus did, seeking out those who, when presented with truth, will respond with a saving faith in Jesus. And they are indeed out there.

Challenge: Open your heart in prayer for a greater portion of faith with which to share your love for those near and far.

Challenge Up: How did you come to know Jesus and the precious three angels’ messages? List three spiritual blessings that you have experienced from Jesus in your personal life. Prepare to share these concepts with your Sabbath School class.

Further Thought: “Among those whom the Jews styled heathen were men who had a better understanding of the Scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah than had the teachers in Israel. There were some who hoped for His coming as a deliverer from sin. Philosophers endeavored to study into the mystery of the Hebrew economy. But the bigotry of the Jews hindered the spread of the light.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 33.

“The Lord Jesus, the mighty Saviour, has died for these souls. He can arouse them from their indifference, he can awaken their sympathies, he can soften their hearts, he can reveal to their souls the beauty and power of the truth. The Master-worker is God, and not finite man; and yet he calls upon men to be the agents through whom he can impart light to those in darkness. God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world, but in humility and love, present to all the truth as it is in Jesus. Let men see piety and devotion, let them behold Christlikeness of character, and they will be drawn to the truth. . . . They are to lift up Jesus, the world’s Redeemer; they are to hold forth the word of life.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 17, 1893.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the immediate needs in the areas where you live that could give you and your church the opportunity to reach out to souls who don’t know the truths that we do?
- 2 Look at Ellen G. White’s words above regarding those of other faiths: “God has jewels in all the churches, and it is not for us to make sweeping denunciation of the professed religious world.” In other words, how can we show people the error of their ways while at the same time not denigrating the people personally?
- 3 “‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’ ” (*Luke 18:8, NKJV*). What does Jesus mean by this rhetorical question? What is the difference between faith and belief? Why might people who have the correct belief be found void of faith when Christ returns?

Dreaming Dreams: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sixteen-year-old Joseph Delamou was anxious. He worried that he wasn't attending the right church in Conakry, capital of the West African country of Guinea.

"Show me the way," he prayed. "I'll go wherever You lead." That night, he had a vivid dream. He dreamed that he and 70 members of his church were on a compound, making plans on how to grow their congregation. Outside the compound loomed the palace of a mighty king, the ruler of the world.

Abruptly, a unit of soldiers burst into the compound. "You need to leave," a soldier told Joseph. "We want to train you to join our ranks."

Joseph didn't want to leave, but the soldier insisted. "You can't stay," he said. "Leave. Go anywhere you want. Just don't stay here. After three days, you can come back and see what has happened to these people."

Joseph left and, returning three days later, found a very quiet compound. He wondered where everyone was. Then he saw a boy hiding behind the wall of the king's palace. The boy was bleeding and, when Joseph tried to talk to him, put a finger to his lips.

"Come over here," he whispered.

After Joseph drew near, the boy said, "Your God is great!"

"What?" Joseph asked.

"I said, 'Your God is great!' " the boy said. "How is it that you are the only person who left us three days ago? Many of us were shot and killed, but you are the only one who escaped. How?"

Joseph pressed the boy for details, and the boy led him to a mound of dirt. He said it was the mass grave of more than 40 people. "The soldiers didn't train anyone," he said. "They shot people and took survivors away in cages."

Then Joseph noticed a snake lying motionless on the ground. The boy said it was the king who had lived in the palace, and he had been slain. "Let me show you the prince who has taken over from the king," he said.

Joseph couldn't take his eyes off the snake. "How did a snake rule the world and call itself king?" he asked. "I don't understand how people could accept a snake as king."

"I can't explain this to you right now," the boy replied.

At that moment, Joseph woke up. He didn't understand the dream. But he sensed God was calling him to leave the church of his father. Where should he go?



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30 will help spread the gospel in the West-Central Africa Division, which includes Guinea. Thank you for planning a generous offering. Read more about Joseph next week.

Part I: Overview

Although the Gospel according to Matthew was written specifically for a Jewish audience, the presence of Gentiles near Jesus is a recurring theme in its narrative, sometimes in contrast to the devotion of Israelites. For example, while the Magi (Persian astrologers) come a long way to honor Israel's true king, the chief priests and scribes (Herod's wise men) make no effort to do so. A Roman centurion's faith is praised by Jesus as greater than that of Israelites (*Matt. 8:10*). The Gentile execution squad is the first to confess Jesus' divine Sonship after His crucifixion (*Matt. 27:54*). In this distinctive way, Matthew highlights three things: (1) God's redemptive plan has always included all the nations on the earth; (2) Gentiles are not insensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit; and (3) laying aside ethnic, cultural, and religious prejudice to love and serve others, as Christ did, is a prerequisite to effective cross-cultural ministry. Thus, apart from being a call to global mission, Matthew's Gospel also is a message of ethnic reconciliation in Christ.

The other Gospel writers also highlight notable interactions of Jesus with Gentiles: He extended His outreach to the Gentile region of the Gadarenes (*Mark 5:1*), He healed a Roman centurion's servant (*Luke 7:1-10*), and He ministered to a Samaritan city (*John 4*). Jesus' interactions with foreigners revealed that the kingdom of God is for all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus demonstrated in practical ways that God has always been concerned with extending His love and forgiveness to all nations.

Part II: Commentary

God's Missionary Heart for the Nations During Old Testament Times

God has always desired a covenant relationship with all human societies. Not only was God concerned with saving Israelites but also, through Abraham, He wanted His redemptive grace to be extended to every nation (*Gen. 12:1-3*). The calling of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations singularly indicates that the inclusion of these nations in God's redemptive plan was not an afterthought. Said differently, God's desire for the Gentiles (the nations of the world) to experience His salvation was not His plan B. Centuries later, after the call of Abraham, God extended the same call to Abraham's biological descendants (Israel) to be a nation of priests to all nations (*Exod. 19:6*). On numerous occasions, God reminded the Israelites that they were chosen not

because they were the best among the nations (*e.g.*, *Deuteronomy* 7) but because God loved them. Israel was chosen to be the vehicle through which other nations would come to know and worship God. Israel was to be a light to the rest of the nations. In *Jeremiah* 2:3, Israel is referred to as the firstfruit of God's harvest, meaning there was a larger harvest outside of Israel. Right from the time that God called Abraham to be His flag bearer, His plan was to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles alike. Israel, as a nation, was therefore not chosen by God to the exclusion of every other nation. The account of the Old Testament is punctuated with stories of Gentiles who embraced the God of Israel as their God. Examples include Rahab, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite, and the Queen of Sheba.

Although God chose Israel as a nation to be His representative, He did not leave the mediation of His redemptive plan only to them. In many other ways, God unrelentingly revealed Himself to people of other nations. Ellen G. White makes the following important observation: "Outside of the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 33.

Melchizedek, a Canaanite priest-king, is one such non-Israelite to whom God reached out without the intermediary of other humans. Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High (El Elyon). The account of Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham in *Genesis* 14:14–24 is very instructive. Abraham identifies his God, Yahweh, with El Elyon in three ways. First, he conjoined the two divine names—Yahweh and El Elyon—in a gesture that suggests they point to the same God (*Gen. 14:22*). Second, Abraham gave Melchizedek's description of El Elyon to Yahweh: Maker of heaven and earth (*Gen. 14:22*). Third, Abraham's acceptance of Melchizedek's blessings and his gift of his tithe to the Canaanite priest suggest that Abraham legitimized Melchizedek's priesthood (*Gen. 14:19, 20*). God had chosen Melchizedek "to be His representative among the people of that time, although he belonged to the Canaanite Community."—Jacques B. Doukhan, *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), p. 214.

It is important to note that God's unrelenting missionary outreach to His creatures in various ways does not make believers' involvement in mission irrelevant. *Matthew* 28:18–20 and *1 Peter* 2:9 point out that making disciples for Christ is our fundamental reason for existence both as a church and as individual believers. It is a privilege for us to be co-laborers with God in what He could accomplish perfectly well without our participation. Also, knowing that God is ahead of

us, preparing the ground for the sowing of the gospel seed, is another incentive to accept the privilege He graciously extends to us to be part of His team.

God's Missionary Heart for the Nations in the New Testament

As noted above, although most of Jesus' public ministry was conducted in Jewish territory, the number of His personal encounters with Gentiles recorded in the Gospels is remarkable. Jesus goes as far as stating that He has other sheep outside of the Jewish community (*John 10:16*). Through the life and ministry of Jesus and His commissioning of His followers to make disciples of all nations (*Matt. 28:18–20, Acts 1:8*), the early Christians gradually understood that God's covenant promise to welcome not just the descendants of Abraham but people of all other nations as His heirs would be enacted through the witness of the church. With the conversion of Cornelius's household (*Acts 10*), something new broke into the life of the nascent Christian community. That event and the subsequent lengthy deliberation on the meaning of this new thing that God was doing (*Acts 15*) convinced the early church that the admission of the Gentiles into the commonwealth of believers, as full beneficiaries of God's redemptive work in Christ, was ordained by God. As such, there was nothing they could do to invalidate this divine decree. Rather, it was now their responsibility not to overlook anybody in the sharing of the gospel.

As the inclusive people of God, called out of every nation to constitute one spiritual entity (*1 Pet. 2:9*), the church was called, enabled by the Holy Spirit, and commissioned to execute the missionary task of being the light of the nations, which Israel as a nation had failed to become. First Peter 2:9 therefore makes clear that the entire Christian community is God's particular possession from among all the peoples of the earth. This verse combines the assertion of the identity of believers as God's elect and holy covenant people with their responsibility of proclaiming the wonderful acts of God to all who have not yet surrendered their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Convinced of his apostleship to the Gentiles (*Rom. 11:13, Rom. 15:16, Gal. 2:7*) and boosted by the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15*), Paul dedicated the bulk of his ministry to the Gentiles. His unflinching commitment to this mission propelled the gospel outside the borders of the nation. God's aim for commissioning Paul to the unreached Gentiles was to show that His offer of salvation is for all people.

Part III: Life Application

Knowing God's intention for every people group to experience His salvation, we are called to take up His mission. Just as Israel, as a nation, was mandated to be a light to the Gentiles, we as Christians—or spiritual Israel—also are commanded to be God's ambassadors to people who have not yet accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior (*Matt. 28:18–20, 2 Cor. 5:20*). Clearly, Christ's disciples have an obligation to the unreached. The good news is that we do not necessarily have to go to the ends of the earth to find the unreached. There are, in every context of life, people who have not yet responded to the gospel. They may be our next-door neighbors, our colleagues, our classmates, our customers, our patients, or our students. We may encounter them as immigrants, refugees, international students, diplomats, or international businesspeople. Whatever the social, cultural, and religious background of the unreached people we encounter and minister to, we need to acknowledge that we cannot effectively minister to any group of people without first freeing ourselves from stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination toward them. We, therefore, need to pray that God will liberate us from any such prejudice.

Notes
