

Discipleship

Discipling the Nations

Lesson #10 for March 8, 2014

Scriptures: Isaiah 56:6-8; Matthew 11:20-24; John 12:20-32; Romans 15:12; Acts 1:6-8.

1. This lesson focuses on the challenge of spreading the gospel to the entire world. Adventists—particularly in light of Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; and especially Revelation 14:6-7—should feel the urgency of this task. This means all of us!
2. When He called Abraham to leave Ur, it was God’s original plan to make him a missionary to all nations. (Genesis 12:1-3) In many places throughout the Old Testament, the Israelite nation was challenged to carry the gospel to the surrounding nations. They were placed at the crossroads of the world in their day with a specific intent that they were to spread the gospel to those who passed through. But, as we know, they quickly lost sight of that goal and settled down in their complacency and soon adopted many of the evil practices of their pagan neighbors. Starting with the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, originally in order to protect themselves from joining in the religious practices of their neighbors, they shunned those around them and would not associate with them at all.
3. The disciples did not seem to get the message that they should spread to gospel to the nations around them, even when Jesus came to this earth and made very specific efforts to reach out to the Samaritans, to the woman of Tyre and Sidon, and even to the demoniacs from Decapolis. Where is the balance between “avoiding pollution” and witnessing?
4. In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked repeatedly about spreading the gospel to the entire world. By contrast, what was happening in Isaiah’s day? Should we visit other churches?
5. Read Isaiah 56:6-8; Micah 4:1-2; and Jonah 3:7-10; 4:1. Jonah did just about everything possible to avoid going to Nineveh to preach the gospel to Israel’s archenemies. When God spared those Ninevites because they reformed their ways and repented, Jonah was angry. He thought that his prophetic reputation had been ruined. Try to imagine Jonah leaving employment in the king’s service in Samaria and heading alone on the long trip to Nineveh and leaving behind the message that he was going to single-handedly destroy that city. But instead, he had to come back home and say they had repented and that God did not destroy them! How would you compare Paul and Jonah? (Romans 1:16-17)
6. When Solomon built that magnificent temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, it was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations. Many of the minor prophets repeated that message.
7. In the early days of the Christian church, the disciples scattered to the Gentile world. While we do not know many of the details, we know that the gospel spread as far as India and up into Europe. But, the Devil was not going to allow that effort to go unimpeded. Historically, we know what happened. Many years later, there had to be a Protestant Reformation and then the great religious awakening of the early 1800s.

Consider these words from Ellen White about our mission as Seventh-day Adventists.

In the name of the Lord let us lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving for the results of work abroad.

And still our General, who never makes a mistake, says to us: “Advance. Enter new territory. Lift up the standard in every land. ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’” [Isaiah 60:1]

Our watchword is to be: Onward, ever onward. The angels of God will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the “regions beyond” can never be laid down until the whole earth shall be lightened with the glory of the Lord.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 28.3-29.1. [Content in brackets is added.]

8. What do we know about the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah? Why do you think God chose to destroy those two cities? Their names have become symbolic of immorality and evil. But, read Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 4:25-30; 17:11-19; and John 10:16. Is it really possible that Capernaum, the hometown of Peter and later of Jesus, as well as Bethsaida, the original hometown of Peter, Andrew, and Phillip, (John 1:44; 12:21) will be considered in the judgment as worse than Sodom and Gomorrah? Why did the people of Nazareth have such a problem with Jesus? They were ready to kill their hometown Hero—Jesus the Messiah—because He suggested that God had worked outside of Israel!
9. It is easy for us to look at the ancient Jews and deride them for their behavior. But, are we inclined to make the same mistakes? Why did the Jewish people get so upset when Jesus said things that they did not want to hear?
10. We as Seventh-day Adventists have more spiritual light than any other people in history. Why have we been so blessed? How much do we owe to our fellow human beings? What are we doing with all that spiritual light? What is our responsibility? What is our privilege?
11. Read John 12:20-32 and Matthew 2:1-12. What are we supposed to learn from the fact that the magi came from the east at the birth of Christ while Greeks came from the west just before His death? While the Jewish people and especially the Jewish religious leaders were doing everything possible to arrest and kill Jesus, people from the far ends of the civilized world of that day were coming to Jerusalem to see Him. Jesus was in the court of the temple when He spoke to those Greeks and the Voice was heard from heaven. And Jesus assured the Greek inquirers that that blessing was for their sake. He told them that He was about to be lifted up from the earth; but by doing so, He would draw everyone to Himself. Did He make any distinctions when He gave that statement? Or, did He really mean to include men, women, Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, and even barbarians? (Galatians 3:28) And even heavenly beings? Are they included in “everyone”? (John 12:32; *GNB*)
12. Just before that, Jesus had given them some words of warning: “Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal.” (John 12:25, *GNB*) What did Jesus intend when He said we must hate our life on this earth?
13. Read the story of the good Samaritan as recorded in Luke 10:27-37. The young man who came to Jesus proved that he was well-versed in Scripture because he answered his original question himself. But, the Jewish people, especially the Jewish leaders, spent hours arguing about who should be considered their neighbor even among the different groups of Jews. Jesus did not spend a lot of time arguing with them philosophically or otherwise about that issue. He simply told the story of the good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side of the road were in the crowd that heard Christ’s words. (*The Desire of Ages* 499.1) There was so much prejudice against Samaritans among the Jews that the young man would not even mention the word *Samaritan*. He simply called him “the one who had mercy on him.” Think of the irony of the fact that the priests and Levites who should have been the spiritual leaders and the ones who reached out to others in spreading the gospel were the ones foremost in trying to attack Jesus and, if possible, arresting Him and killing Him.
14. In light of the story which Jesus told about the good Samaritan, is there any question in our

minds about who is our neighbor? Who in our world in our day is in the greatest need?

Thus the question, "Who is my neighbor?" is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.5.

15. Read Romans 15:12; Acts 1:6-8; John 11:52-53; and Matthew 28:19-20. How do these passages fit with Revelation 14:6-7 and Matthew 24:14? In light of all these passages, is there any doubt about what God's intentions for us are when it comes to spreading the gospel? Are Seventh-day Adventists ready to be foremost in overturning racial, ethnic, social, and language barriers to open the way for the progress of the gospel? Are we ready to open our wallets and checkbooks to support those who are doing that work? Are we prepared to do it ourselves in some cases?

16. Consider these words from Ellen White:

Although the work in foreign fields has not advanced as it should have advanced, yet that which has been accomplished affords reason for gratitude and ground for encouragement. Much less means has been spent in these fields than in the home fields, and the work has been done under the hardest pressure and without proper facilities. Yet, considering the help that has been sent to these fields, the result is indeed surprising. **Our missionary success has been fully proportionate to our self-denying, self-sacrificing effort.** God alone can estimate the work accomplished as the gospel message has been proclaimed in clear, straight lines. New fields have been entered, and aggressive work has been done. The seeds of truth have been sown, the light has flashed upon many minds, bringing enlarged views of God and a more correct estimate as to the character to be formed. Thousands have been brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. They have been imbued with the faith that works by love and purifies the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 28.1. [Bold type is added.]

17. It is very easy for us to comfortably sit back in our pews and think that the work of spreading the gospel should be delegated to the pastor and the missionaries. What have they not done that they should have done?

We are not to feel that the work of the gospel depends principally upon the minister. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 427.

18. Are we guilty of categorizing people? Do we separate them into groups such as African, Asian, European, American, etc.? Do we even find it easy to put them in categories such as good or bad? Resident or alien? Even saint or sinner?

19. Try making a list of 10 things we share in common with all our fellow human beings. Now

try making a list of 10 things—excluding matters of faith—that make us different from others. Which did you find easier? We have so many more similarities than differences.

20. Why do you think Israel failed in their original task that God assigned them? What should they have done that they did not do? What can we learn from their mistakes? There is never a time for us to say that “we have the truth.” There is not going to be any exclusivity in God’s kingdom. Now is the time we need to get used to breaking down cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial barriers. In ancient times, the Jews divided everyone into Jews and Gentiles. The Greeks divided all peoples into Greeks and barbarians because they thought that anyone who did not speak Greek was just saying, “Bar, bar, bar, bar.”
21. Have you ever had the privilege of traveling or working in a culture where you were in a minority? What was it like? Were you comfortable there?
22. There are two great lessons we can learn from spreading the gospel to others: 1) As we try to tell the gospel story to others, we learn how much about the gospel we do not really understand ourselves! We need to study it and study it again and practice trying to explain it to others until we can express it clearly. And 2) As we seek to reach out to others, we might find that they may have a lot of things to teach us as well! Did Melchizedek teach Abraham anything? Did Jethro teach Moses anything? There were a lot of things that Uriah the Hittite could have taught David!
23. How many people from the Old Testament can you name who came into the Jewish community from outside? What about Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah the Hittite? Except for Joseph who married an Egyptian, most, if not all, of the sons of Jacob probably married Canaanite women!
24. Review the story of Jonah. Why was Jonah so opposed to preaching to the Ninevites/Assyrians? Admittedly, that nation was a nation of war, and they were very cruel to their enemies. Didn’t Jonah think that God could take care of him if he went to preach there? The idea that God might actually be reaching out to those enemy Assyrians was against everything Jonah believed!
25. Have you had the privilege of working with any non-Christians? Hindus? Muslims? Buddhist? Even atheists? How should we relate to these non-Christian groups? If we are supposed to spread the gospel to the entire world, doesn’t that include all of those groups?
26. Read Psalms 86:9; Isaiah 52:10; 56:7; and 61:11. Do we really believe that God intends to make our churches houses of prayer for all nations and all peoples? Are we prepared to welcome the homeless? Even non-Christians and atheists?
27. What would happen in your church if a delegation from your town or city came to your church and said, “We want to see Jesus”? Have you thought about how you would approach a Muslim, Buddhist, or an atheist if they should ask questions about your religion? How can we prepare ourselves for that time which is coming?

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