

# ***Biblical Missionaries***

## ***The Missionary Nature of God***

Lesson #1 for July 4, 2015

Scriptures: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17; 1 John 2:16; John 3:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 5:13-14.

1. Two worldviews are prominent among Christians. One of those views holds that things will become better and better until we enter the golden age of the millennium. Another prominent view holds that things will get worse and worse until the day of the Lord comes, the plagues fall on the world, and Jesus appears in the clouds to rescue His people.
2. What was the condition of our world in its original state before sin? How did we get from that to where we are now? As we look around us in the world, is it any surprise that Jesus predicted that at the end of this world's history, there would be wars and rumors of wars? But, God has promised a new heaven and a new earth. (Revelation 21:1)
3. However, between now and then, we face a formidable enemy. Satan knows that if God's people accomplish the work they are supposed to accomplish, it will be all over for him. So, he is doing everything possible to prevent us from doing our work.
4. What did God have in mind when He made man and woman to be like Himself? (Genesis 1:26-28) God carefully formed man from the clay of the ground, molding him and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. That process was very different from His "straightforward" commands on the other days of creation. Do you think the three Members of the Godhead spent time consulting together before They created human beings? Human beings were created to be in charge of the other creatures of this world. Why? We were given that responsibility because we were made in the image and likeness of God. Doesn't that suggest that we are supposed to reflect His character? If we as human beings are supposed to be responsible for the other creatures in this world, that suggests responsibility.
5. Read Acts 17:25,28. These verses along with many others in Scripture suggest that we are totally dependent upon God for our daily, hourly, and minute-by-minute existence.
6. So, what kind of creatures did God create? Why did He place in that garden not just the tree of life but also the tree of knowledge of good and evil? (Genesis 2:9) Was that necessary to give Adam and Eve a choice? And freedom? There was no tree in heaven; and yet, Lucifer sinned. That tree was placed in the garden to allow Satan his freedom and access to the couple, but prevent him from chasing Adam and Eve everywhere they went. We know that as a result of their choice to eat the fruit and, thus, distrust God and disobey Him, they proved that they had the ability to rebel against Him. Choose Satan and selfishness; or choose God and love.
7. Why didn't God just create us so that we would automatically obey His will? Among the creatures that God created on this world, human beings are the only ones given that moral responsibility. First John 4:8,16 tell us, "God is love." Is that suggesting that God wants us to be loving as well? What are the implications of creating loving beings?
8. See handout entitled "Love." ([www.Theox.org](http://www.Theox.org) website; Teacher's Guides: General Topics)
9. God will never use force to try to get us to do His will. Using force would eliminate freedom. But, wrong choices have bad consequences; and we need to learn about those consequences. We need to understand the consequences of doing evil as well as the consequences of doing good. What God wants most is freely-given love from His children. Love can never be forced.

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God,

Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.1.

10. Think of the implications of human free will. Although we recognize that God is supremely powerful, even omnipotent, He will never use His power to force us to make certain moral choices. Since that is true, we become morally responsible for our actions. This carries over into the world of science and physical law. Not everything that occurs is solely a result of cause-and-effect. Human beings have free moral choices which can impact what happens.
11. How many truly free moral choices do we have on a regular basis? Read Genesis 3:6-7. What was the sin of Eve and Adam? There was no poison in that fruit. In itself, eating fruit is not a sinful act. Their sin was in distrusting God and directly disobeying Him. That has been and always will be Satan's primary goal—to get us to distrust God and disobey Him. Satan would be more than happy to use force to get us to do that. But, while God will allow him to tempt us, God will not allow him to force us to sin. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
12. In the immediate context, what was the result of Adam and Eve's sin? (Genesis 3:23-24) Adam and Eve had to leave their garden home. God could not allow sinners to continue to partake of the tree of life and, thus, perpetuate evil for eternity. Would you want to live forever in a world full of sin like our current world environment? Would the problems all go away if God simply eliminated Satan? (James 1:13-15)
13. Read 1 John 2:16. What does that verse tell us about the nature of our sins? How prevalent in our world are selfishness, greed, envy, and pride?
14. What is incredible in all of this is that God did not give up on us when we sinned. He came looking for us, and He continues to pursue us with His love. Why did Adam and Eve try to hide from God? Do we still want to hide from Him?

In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.

Was that true even in the days of the flood?

15. So, we see that God has always been on a missionary outreach to human beings.

Of course, the greatest revelation of God's missionary activity can be seen in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus. Though Jesus came to this earth to do many things—to destroy Satan, to reveal the true character of the Father, to prove Satan's accusations wrong, to show that God's law can be kept—the crucial reason was to die on the cross in the place of humanity, in order to save us from the ultimate result of sin, which is eternal death. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, July 1, 2015)

Is it true that the most important reason for Jesus's death was to save us from eternal death? Ellen White suggested something quite different. Is God trying to teach us something? (1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20; John 12:32)

16. So, how are these reasons for the death of Jesus related to each other?

It was in order that the **heavenly universe** might see the conditions of the

covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** [Compare Romans 3:4.] By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the **unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race,** and every mouth would be stopped.... Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—**The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899, par 2. Compare *LHU* 257.2. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

17. Is it really possible that dying for us was not the most important reason Jesus came?
18. Read John 3:14-15; Isaiah 53:4-6; and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus was crucified on a cross to save us. He suffered the consequences of sin that was ours. All the while, we thought that it was punishment sent by God. How many Christians believe and teach that the death of Christ was a punishment sent from God? Jesus died the second death to show us what He meant in Genesis 2:17, even though He was never a sinner. In imagination, we can watch Him die, and we can watch Him live. We can choose to live lives like He lived; or, we will die a death like He died. By being selfish, we can be like Satan; by being loving, we can be like God.
19. So, how is the mission of God related to our mission? Jesus stated plainly more than once that He came not to judge the world but to be its Savior. (John 3:17; 12:47) Then, He went on to say that just as the Father had sent Him, He is sending us. (John 20:21)
20. Read Matthew 5:13-16. In what ways are we supposed to be like salt and light? Salt and light work in quite different ways. Salt needs to be mixed in with the material of which it is to become a part, and it operates internally. By contrast, light cannot be covered. It operates externally, illuminating all around it. In what ways are we supposed to be like salt? And in what ways are we supposed to be like a light?
21. It was God's original plan for the children of Israel to be a light to all the nations around them. They were supposed to be a healthy, happy, and holy people who would attract others to want to be like them. Unfortunately, it did not actually work out like that.
22. What overall influence do Christians have on the world? Do other people observe the members of your church and want to be better people as a result?

Hearts that respond to the influence of the Holy Spirit are the channels through which God's blessing flows. **Were those who serve God removed from the earth, and His Spirit withdrawn from among men, this world would be left to desolation and destruction, the fruit of Satan's dominion. Though the wicked know it not, they owe even the blessings of this life to the presence, in the world, of God's people whom they despise and oppress. But if Christians are such in name only, they are like the salt that has lost its savor. They have no influence for good in the world. Through their misrepresentation of God they are worse than unbelievers.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 306.4. [Bold type is added.]

23. Are we correctly representing God? Are we doing it well? Are our churches more like "clubs for saints"? Or, "hospitals for sinners"? Have we taken seriously the challenge to witness for God—to be lights or salt for the world?

The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high

and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth. Not all are called to personal labor in foreign fields, but all can do something by their prayers and their gifts to aid the missionary work.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 29.3.

24. How well is the Seventh-day Adventist Church doing in explaining to the world the reason for the life and death of Jesus Christ? Do the people who live in your community recognize you as a light to the community?
25. When we say that God is love, what is implied by that? In order for a person to be loving, he must have someone else to whom he can relate. How are we relating to those around us? Do we feel a real sense of obligation to the mission God has given us? (2 Peter 3:1-12)
26. Thinking about the life of Jesus and the ways in which He served all around Him, how well are we doing? Do you feel a sense of being sent by God to your community? Could mission be a part of everything that we do? Are we ready to say: “Here am I, send me”? (Isaiah 6:8) Could we literally become the hands and feet that will carry God’s message to the world?
27. What are the most important characteristics of God? How can we come to be more like Him? Satan has claimed that no one would choose to serve God just because s/he loves Him. He actually believes that if we were each left completely free, we would choose to follow him and his selfishness. Is that true? Why is it that so few people down through the history of our world seem to have chosen God’s side? Is the focus of our church and our Sabbath school class as well as our individual focus outward instead of inward? How do we relate to the other members of the church? How do we relate to the members of the community? In our series of lessons for the next three months, we will discover that even in the Old Testament, there were plenty of missionaries starting from Abraham, Moses, and some of the later prophets. Of course, the greatest missionary of all was Jesus Christ Himself.
28. Did God make it clear to the Israelites in ancient times that they had a responsibility to reach out to the nations around them? Read Deuteronomy 10:19; Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 82:8; and Micah 4:2. Isaiah made it clear that God’s temple was to become a house of prayer for all nations. (Isaiah 56:7) Read also Isaiah 56:3 and Isaiah 45:22. Israel was supposed to be a light to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 49:6) How well did they do? Why did they so completely fail in that task?
29. As a church, could we fail as well? Do we need to take a careful look at our priorities as individuals and as a church?

Jesus did not create a church and then give it mission as one of its tasks. The divine sending plan comes prior to the church. Mission gives birth to the church and is its mother.... If the church ceases to be missionary, it has not simply failed in its task, but has actually ceased being the church.—Jon Dybdahl, *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999, pp. 17,18). See Ephesians 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20.

30. Let us never forget that the mission to reach out to the world is God’s mission; it is not our mission. Our mission is to cooperate with God as much as we are able. Sometimes, we talk about methods that could be used to evangelize people of other denominations and especially of other religions. We discuss “unentered territories” and even “contextualization.” Understood in their setting, these methodologies can be very helpful. But, we must never overlook our primary goal and purpose which is to represent Jesus Christ. Could that happen in our lifetimes? Could Jesus come back soon?

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