

# Bible Studies for Adventists



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## Commentary on “Mission”

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### Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, June 20, 2009

#### Overview

“Mission is the heart of the church. The destiny 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 existence. Each Christian is called to be a missionary.” [Quoted from “This Week at a Glance”]

#### Problems

I can’t disagree with this statement. On its face, it is true. What we will see throughout this lesson, however, is that truth and error are intertwined as only SDA theologians can intertwine them. Please know that I am not purposely nit-picking, but I see no other way to separate the two.

Here is the first example: “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” (emphasis supplied).

As Christ’s body here on earth (see my comments on Lesson 12) we are representatives of Jesus. This is an almost unimaginable privilege. That He would choose the likes of us to share His gospel with the rest of the world is sheer lunacy, from the standpoint of human thinking, but that’s exactly what He did. And He provides the grace which enables weak humans, whose flesh is ruined by indwelling sin, to be who He has called us to be and do what He has called us to do. So far, so good.

So, how did “to preach the three angels’ messages” enter the equation? Only if you know SDA church history can you understand why this responsibility has been equated to that of representing Jesus. I don’t have time to go into that history here. Here’s the short version.

Jesus did not come back on October 22, 1844. In order to hold onto that date, which had been arrived at by painstaking calculation, another explanation had to be invented. The “Investigative Judgment” was that invention. In order to make an investigative judgment enforceable, a standard was needed. The Ten Commandments were chosen as that standard. Since all Christians claimed to keep the Ten Commandments, the ex-Millerites needed a means of differentiating themselves. The Sabbath (4th commandment) was chosen as that differentiation. This was a stroke of genius, because the vast majority of Christians paid absolutely no attention to the Saturday-Sabbath connection. At the end of the three angels’ messages is this statement: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” They claimed that the “commandments of God” equal the Ten Commandments. They claimed they were the only ones who kept them all, including the 4th. Ergo, they claimed they were the only “true church” and, voila, representing Jesus and preaching the three angels’ messages (which boil down to only one thing – Sabbath observance) became one and the same thing. They even picked a name that was short-hand for this very long and involved process – Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The only problem with this scenario is that none of it can be supported Biblically, at least not without some rather creative eisegeses (reading into the text). Since this proved to be insufficient, they also needed a final authority. Ellen White is that authority.

What we are left with is an untenable situation. We children of God absolutely are called to represent Jesus to the world around us, but we cannot do that if we're weighted down with a complete misunderstanding of the gospel (more on that later in the lesson), and, therefore a complete misunderstanding of law and grace.

Anyone brought to Jesus the Adventist way is doomed to double-mindedness, and unstable in their beliefs (paraphrasing James 1:5-8).

There is an alternative. Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, mentioned later in the lesson, both convicts people of their state of spiritual death and provides the means and method of bringing them to eternal life.

### Summary

1. Mission is one of the most exciting and humbling aspects of a Christian's life.
2. For Adventists, mission is intertwined with their history and theology.
3. Because their theology is so hopelessly flawed, their approach to mission is useless to engender the kind of changed lives God is looking for.
4. Jesus is the solution.

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## Day 2: Sunday, June 21, 2009

### Overview

"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?"

### Problems

Only an SDA writer could find a way to turn some of the most powerful verses in the Bible, verses that tell of Jesus' total sufficiency and the believer's complete assurance of salvation, into a legalistic fire bomb. This is so sad and completely unnecessary.

One would think the verses chosen would answer the ellipsis, but that's not how they're used. Instead they are turned into questions about what I do, whether I take what I do seriously enough, and when I am going to wake up and do more.

In effect the unstated ellipsis at the beginning of this section becomes: unless "you step up to the plate. How will you feel if your Mom, Dad or one of your kids is lost because you didn't share the Adventist message with them? How can you expect to be saved yourself if you were unwilling to make the effort to reach the people you love the most?! Their blood will be on your hands."

Why am I so passionate against the seemingly innocent questions asked by the author? The teacher's comments provide further explanation. Please excuse the long quotation, but it must be included in its entirety to make visible the twisted logic that is Adventist theology. This is a direct quotation. Nothing has been left out and no emphasis has been added.

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### STEP 2—Explore

#### Bible Commentary

#### 1. People Will Be Lost, Unless... (Review with your class John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11, 12.)

The Bible establishes an unambiguous route to salvation. "No one comes to the Father," but through Christ (John 14:6, NIV); salvation is found in "no other name" (Acts 4:12, NIV); and we can know whether or not we have eternal life, because it is "in his Son" and "he who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12, NIV).

Notice in 1 John 5:11-12 that God does not ask us to earn eternal life. God has given it to all who have placed their trust in Jesus as their personal Savior. God has one Way to eternal life, and He has not only given it to us, He has provided the means to get there. Hence, the choice to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord is the most important decision we make in life.

**Consider This:** Other faiths also claim to be the chosen route to God. How would you defend your faith as the only true route to salvation?

How can an author make two completely irreconcilable statements?

• **Statement #1:** “The Bible establishes an unambiguous route to salvation... Christ.”

• **Statement #2:** “Other faiths also claim to be the chosen route to God. How would you defend your faith as the only true route to salvation?” (In this context, “faith” can only be another word for denomination.)

Either Jesus is the unambiguous route to salvation, or the SDA church is the unambiguous route to salvation. Both statements cannot be correct, but the author blithely equates them and asks the teacher to do the same.

Further, what does the rabbit trail at the beginning of this section have to do with mission? Why raise the question of universalism? Nowhere does the Bible teach it. I guess a church that goes so far afield to explain their own beliefs feels it necessary to point out beliefs that are even farther afield in order to justify themselves.

Why can't SDAs use John 14:6, Acts 4:12 and 1 John 5:11-12 and John 3:16 just the way they were written? Because SDAs have no assurance of salvation. There is no assurance in a law-based belief system. There is only fear – fear that I didn't do enough; fear that I didn't get all my sins confessed and forgiven; fear that I'm not as perfect as my Father in heaven.

Here is 1 John 5:13 (NASB) – “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **so that you may know that you have eternal life**” (emphasis supplied). There is nothing about keeping the Law in that statement, so an Adventist can't quote it.

Jesus is everything, or He is nothing. The real answer to the ellipsis at the beginning is: unless they accept Jesus. The verses referenced in this section remove any possibility of universalism. They provide the entire message of salvation. Nothing needs to be added and nothing needs to be taken away. This focus on Jesus removes all the fear from mission. I witness because He is my life. He has forgiven me completely. He has saved me completely. That's a message that I can't wait to share with others. Anything else is a waste of time.

### Summary

1. What a way to start a week's worth of lessons on mission! The lesson quotes some verses about Jesus' sufficiency, but those verses are turned into a club and miss the point entirely.
2. Jesus is the reason for mission.
3. Jesus is the answer to any question about mission.
4. Jesus is our salvation and He removes all fear, because fear has to do with punishment (1 John 4:18).
5. Therefore, Jesus is the motive for mission.

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## Day 3: Monday, June 22, 2009

### Overview

“The command to take the gospel to the entire world is found in all four Gospels, as well as in the book of Acts.”

### Problems

Thankfully, this section is much closer to reality than the previous section. However, the author still can't get away from a behavioral approach to mission – it must be done; after all, Jesus commanded it.

Let's take a look at the passages referenced.

Both Matthew and Mark might more properly be translated, “As you are going...” This connotes something less than a command and more of a promise. Matthew 28:18 should have been included – “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” We can make students (disciples) because Jesus has been given all authority. Our job as missionaries is nothing more or less than pointing people to Him.

Luke, John, and Acts are statements of fact. In effect, “You will be witnesses,” not “You will do witnessing.” A person can't be a witness regarding something or someone unless they actually know the situation or person. In this context, Jesus must be known, and it is the Holy Spirit who reveals Him to us.

I invite any Adventist who truly believes that Jesus is the only way to God to stand up in their local SDA congregation and say the following, “I know I have eternal life, because I have accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. He is my life, and I am secure because I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit Who is the seal of my salvation.”

You probably will discover very quickly that the “world” to whom you have been called to be a witness is that very congregation. Why? Because multiple people will respond with statements like, “The Sabbath is the seal of God,” or “You can't say that you are truly saved until Probation has closed and you have been judged worthy of salvation,” or “Yes, you are saved, but you must continue to keep the Ten Commandments in order to maintain that salvation.”

A conversation regarding people groups around the world who have not heard the gospel is not particularly helpful. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not the same thing as “the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now proclaiming its message...”

For example, I once heard a story of an African who came to the United States to attend a denominational meeting. He had a wonderful testimony regarding how God reached him in spite of his paganism. When asked why he was in the United States, he responded, "Because there are so many people here who don't know Jesus."

Let's make certain our world view of missions is informed by a Spirit-inspired passion to share Jesus rather than an organizational imperative.

### Summary

1. The Great Commission should be interpreted primarily as a statement of fact rather than another command to be kept.
2. As the result of a relationship with the living Jesus, made real in our lives by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we will be witnesses about Him. We can't help it.
3. Our "world" is our sphere of influence. For some, it will be their family or friends. For others, it will be a town or city. We can rest in the assurance that God will equip us for the scope of work He needs us to do.
4. Do not allow guilt-inducing questions ("What difference has your existence made in reaching them?") to draw your eyes off of Jesus to look at your own tiny efforts.

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## Day 4: Tuesday, June 23, 2009

### Overview

"Consider This: Read Matthew 5. Why was Jesus so effective in sharing present truth with the lost of His day?"

(From the Teacher's Comments)

### Problems

Refer back to the brief history of Adventism I offered in the "Sabbath Afternoon" section. Seventh-day Adventists believe that representing Jesus and keeping the Sabbath are identical. In support of this position they offer Matthew 5 as proof of their claim to be the only true church supposedly referenced in Revelation 14:12.

If ever a passage of scripture was explained in exactly the opposite way it was intended, this is it. Jesus begins His discourse with "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and ends the chapter (not the discourse) with "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (NASB). In between and including these two pieces of "encouragement" is a long list of things that no human being has ever been able to accomplish. And it gets no better in Chapters 6 and 7.

Jesus was born under the Law and taught under the Law (see Galatians 4:4-5). The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest amplification of the Law ever given. In fact, the entire sermon is an exposition on the 10th Commandment – You are not even supposed to want to do anything prohibited by the first nine commandments. Jesus quickly left encouragement behind and started meddling in people's lives.

If Jesus hadn't done this, His Jewish listeners would have continued stumbling through their lives oblivious to the Messiah who was talking to them. Instead, He challenged the very core of their belief system, and eventually they had Him crucified for it. He confronted them directly, and He confronts us just as directly today. Will we humbly accept what He says, or will we crucify Him again and again and again?

The Adventist claim to be the only group on earth who keep the Law properly is a bald-faced lie. They are no better at it than any other belief system. Instead of allowing the Law to convict them of the reality of their spiritual death, they promote a 24-hour time period as the Sabbath instead of the 24/7 reality of resting in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they have made an idol of the 4th Commandment and broken the 2nd Commandment.

All who rely on keeping the Law are under a curse (see Galatians 3:10). Anyone who keeps the entire Law, but fails at one point, is guilty of breaking it all (see James 2:10). And yet Adventists still claim to be under the Law themselves and desire the rest of the world to be under it with them.

I believe John was completely consistent in his use of "law" to describe the people of God. This is the key to understanding the letter of 1 John and this passage in Revelation. In his letter, John refers to God's law several times before defining what he means. Most denominations, including the SDAs, presume he is talking about the Ten Commandments. The answer is found in 1 John 3:23-24. "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (NASB). John's statement is merely a quotation of Jesus' own words recorded in John's gospel. See John 6:28-29 and John 15:12.

The single greatest difference between Revelation and other biblical apocalyptic literature is that Revelation is a New Covenant statement of the future. Daniel, Ezekiel and all other Old Testament authors wrote under the Old Covenant. Certainly, they were looking forward to Jesus, but John knew the reality. This is why the letter is called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

Is it going too far to claim, in the context of the New Covenant, that John's references to Law in Revelation are to be interpreted in the same way as his quotations of Jesus in his gospel and explanation of those quotations in his first letter? I think not. When there has been a change in the priesthood, there must be a change in the Law (see Hebrews 7:12). Therefore, the reference to those who keep the law in Revelation 14:12 could only mean those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior and by the indwelling Holy Spirit allow His love to overflow to others. In other words, the passage has nothing whatever to do with the Old Covenant law.

Finally, I honestly have never heard that "angel" in prophecy is a symbol for human messengers. I don't even recall being taught this in my Ministerial Studies courses at what was then the La Sierra Campus of Loma Linda University, the Ellen White quote notwithstanding.

### Summary

1. Jesus was not effective in sharing "present truth" with the people of His day, at least in the way SDAs believe. He was crucified for it.
2. Jesus was completely effective in giving the Mosaic Law the emphasis it deserved. He called people to take an honest look at their hopeless condition, and then He claimed Himself to be the only way out of that condition.
3. We do no one a favor by putting them under law. In fact, we doom them.
4. The law can do only one thing – prove our state of spiritual death.
5. Jesus defeated both sin and death, and He ushered in a New Covenant.
6. It is to this New Covenant that we to call people. Their only hope is Jesus, not a denomination.
7. Therefore, the SDA claim to be the only true church is false.

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## Day 5: Wednesday, June 24, 2009

### Overview

"When the body is working for the salvation of others, something wonderful happens to its individual parts. 'Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves...' " (from the Teacher's Comments).

### Problems

The problem with Wednesday's section is not so much the approach taken in the quarterly as the statement quoted above from the Teacher's Comments.

The lesson makes great use of the texts offered to point to the proper role of church (that is, individuals united in Christ, not an organization) and how the Holy Spirit equips believers. At times, this line of reasoning sounds almost non-Adventist.

The quote above suggests something different, however. To quote Paul in Ephesians 4:13, the purpose of these incredible gifts God gave to the church is that "we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (NASB). The point of works of service and building up the body of Christ is to realize Verse 13.

Verses 14 and following (no longer infants, etc.) is the result of Verse 13.

I don't believe this is too fine a point. No Christian will be settled in his or her beliefs by activity, although activity done in concert with other Christians can draw us together and help us mature. It is maturity, not activity, which results in conviction, that is, the immovable assurance of my salvation.

If I allow a church organization to define conviction in terms of the activities it approves and encourages, then I will have reneged on my responsibility to listen to the Holy Spirit teach me the meaning of God's word. I will have put myself under the authority of someone other than Jesus Christ. This is never a safe position.

### Summary

This section is a very positive affirmation of the definition of the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit's role in each member's life. As such, it is quite different than the point of view taken in Lesson 12.

That said there still is the tendency in the Teacher's Comments to view the Christian life as a collection of activities (sort of behaviorism-lite) instead of responses to God's initiative.

To the extent that Point #1 above is the true direction of Adventism, praise God!

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## Day 6: Thursday, June 25, 2009

### Overview

“Think about some of the false teachings that exist in the Christian world: eternal torment in hell, the predestination of some people to be saved and others to be lost, the belief that Jesus Christ was not divine but merely a great man. How could these and other false teachings negatively impact our understanding of God and the plan of salvation?”

### Problems

Handing this question to a person who spent nearly fifteen years studying his way out of the Adventist church is like handing a box of matches and a can of gasoline to an arsonist. In case anyone reading these comments didn't know; yes, I am completely biased against Adventist teaching.

So why make such an admission? Won't showing my hand prevent people from reading further? Perhaps, but consider the following.

“In the preaching of the gospel, many specious beliefs are added by well-meaning, and not-so-well-intentioned, people. It is these unclean, human-made doctrines that Jesus denounced as ‘rules taught by men’ (Matt. 15:9, NIV)” (from the Teacher's Comments).

This may be the truest statement made in the entire week's lesson. However, the obvious, though unstated, bias of the author is that ALL other belief systems (the “Christian world” in the Overview quotation above) are inferior to Adventism. ALL other belief systems introduce specious beliefs to the true gospel.

I submit that Adventism itself has introduced a host of specious beliefs. They are unclean, human-made doctrines that Jesus would denounce.

For example, Paul defined the “gospel that saves” as follows: “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, NASB).

So the gospel that saves is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the miraculously fully God and fully human person of the Bible. This is the message we witnesses are called to take to the world. This is our mission.

It's not death, burial, resurrection – and tongues, or tithing, or the Sabbath, or election, or the Investigative Judgment, or anything else. Anything we add to the gospel that saves nullifies it.

Paul was so passionate regarding this truth that he told the Galatians that “even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed” (Galatians 1:8, NASB)!

Jesus said something similar to the Pharisees. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15, NASB).

We are not witnesses of Jesus in order to convince people to be Adventists, Baptists, Methodists, or any other belief system. We are witnesses of Jesus in order to bring people to Him. No denomination has it all correct, and no denomination has it all wrong. It is the mixing of right and wrong that confuses those to whom we witness. If we would stop trying to prove that our belief system is “right” and simply bring people to Jesus, we might be amazed at the unity of belief that would result. This unity would occur because the Holy Spirit was allowed to teach the people what they need to know.

It's ironic, I think, that the more carefully any denomination defines its beliefs, the more differentiation it achieves from other denominations, but the farther from real truth it veers.

### Summary

1. It is disingenuous for Seventh-day Adventists to talk about the false teachings in the rest of the Christian world. False teaching exists, and it is no respecter of church, SDA or otherwise.
2. The “gospel that saves” (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus) is the only message worth taking to the lost world. Only Jesus has the power to change lives.

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## Day 7: Friday, June 26, 2009

### Overview

“How do we as a church protect ourselves from many of the dangerous theological trends that constantly are seeking to infiltrate and 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?”

## Problems

The author thought the topic started in Thursday's lesson was worth further discussion. I agree. Let's take the questions apart to see if we can figure out what is really being asked.

"How do we as a church protect ourselves?" In the context of this entire quarter's lessons, "we as a church" can mean only one thing – the Seventh-day Adventist church – and "we as a church" must be protected. This idea is so ingrained into Adventist thinking that they cannot conceive of any other possibility. The Biblical answer is, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3, NASB).

"Dangerous theological trends that constantly are seeking to infiltrate and pollute our teachings" – There indeed are many dangerous theological trends. One has to look no further than the average religious TV channel or radio station for examples of such things. All of us must deal with these attacks every day of our lives. I disagree that these trends themselves are "seeking to infiltrate" the body of Christ. It is people, ravenous wolves (John 10:11-12 and elsewhere), who are trying to foist these lies on us. Our only safety is Jesus.

"How do we remain open to growing and advancing in new light?" Here is the problem with Adventism. From its beginning, this denomination has consistently defined every whim of doctrine it embraced as "new light". The Bible has defined all the light we need to understand. There is no new revelation necessary. There may be new application (slavery, for example), but there is no new revelation.

"Better understand our Lord and our mission" – Do you want to better understand Jesus? First, read about Him in his context as the One born under law that He might redeem those under law. Then, read what John, Paul, James, Peter and Luke have to say about Him in the context of the New Covenant He ushered in. There will be nothing more radically life-changing than this study, and nothing better suited to mission.

## Summary

Contrary to the EGW quote from The Acts of the Apostles, the "church" is not the appointed agency for the salvation of men. Jesus is the appointed agency for the salvation of men.

Jesus works through each member of the body of Christ, via the Holy Spirit, to reveal His love and grace to those who were born in hell, offering them the first real choice they've ever had for a better life, eternal life. Sometimes, Jesus bands groups of believers together into small or large collections so that the gifts being ministered to them by the Holy Spirit can be brought to bear in a more widespread, but focused, way. However He chooses to work, it is His initiative and our response by faith that yields results.

We are never to rely on "the church" to do the work Jesus has called and equipped us to do. "The church" is never to usurp His authority in deciding to whom to witness and what to tell them. The appeal to doctrinal purity is a poor excuse for continued reliance upon the traditions of men.

In conclusion, I offer this quotation from the May/June 2009 issue of *Outreach* magazine. When asked, "Who is Jesus?" this young man responded:

**Who is Jesus? That's the question that governs everything I do. That's the question that governs my marriage. That's the question that governs who I am. It guides my career, it guides my social life, and it guides my financial decisions. And I don't know how to answer any of it. I can't believe the Bible, and I can't not believe the Bible, and so I don't know what to do about any of it. And it just makes me really tired.**

**I don't know who Jesus is anymore. I can't put Him in a box and tell you He is what my youth group leader told me He was, and I can't put Him in a box and tell you that He was just a person, which is what Asheville [, NC] would tell me to say.**

**I left a community of faith and came to a community of unfaith, and I'm stuck in between. I haven't got the strength to say that I'm thankful for the place I'm at because it's really awful to be confused. But I think I'm thankful for being able to be confused. The tension drives me toward resolving it.**

There were several responses just like this. Do we need a denomination-driven reason to reach out to people like this? I hope not. These are the people, just like you and me, for whom Jesus died and rose again. Don't try to convert them to Adventism, or any other "ism". If your very soul doesn't ache for them, ask Jesus to take away your heart of stone and give you His heart. Attempting to give them what you don't already have will confuse them more and drive them further away. On the other hand, you never know when the Holy Spirit will lead you, a saved, secure child of the Living God, into a conversation that turns into another person's Today, when they give up on their bankrupt philosophies and accept Jesus.

I pray that each of us will continually look away from ourselves, focusing instead on Jesus, the only One who can and will draw all men unto Himself.