

# The Everlasting Gospel




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 14:6–12; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; Rom. 3:24–26; 1 Pet. 1:18–20; Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8.*

**Memory Text:** “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Revelation 14:6, NKJV*).

In ancient Israel, when the heathen around them were polytheists, worshipping multiple “gods” of wood and stone, Israel’s clear, identifiable, powerful statement of faith was found in Deuteronomy 6:4: “‘Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ ” (*NKJV*).

Throughout the centuries, the chanting of the Shema (the name of the prayer, based on the Hebrew word for “hear”) reminded the Jews of the spiritual vision that united them as a people and that strengthened their resolve to maintain their unique identity as worshipers of the one true God.

For Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14 are our Shema. They are our identifying statement of faith. They define who we are as a people and describe our mission to the world. In short, our unique prophetic identity is outlined in Revelation 14:6–12, and it is here that we find our passion to proclaim the gospel to the world.

In this week’s lesson, we will begin a detailed study of Revelation 14:6–12, but we will do so through the eyes of grace as we listen to God speaking to our hearts.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 15.

## A Grace-Filled Book of Hope

When most people think about the Bible’s last book, Revelation, they do not think about God’s grace. When they consider God’s last-day message, their thoughts often turn immediately to frightening beasts, mystic symbols, and strange images. The book of Revelation scares as many people as it reassures, which is unfortunate because it is, indeed, saturated with grace and filled with hope. That is, even amid the scary beasts and warnings of persecution and the hard times ahead, God still gives us reasons to rejoice in His salvation.

**Read Revelation 1:1–3 and Revelation 14:6. How do these verses together tell us about not just the book of Revelation but about the “everlasting gospel,” as well?**

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Revelation is all about Jesus. It is His message to His people and is especially applicable to His church in the last days. It is the grace-filled message of our end-time hope. Throughout the book, Christ is described as the slain Lamb, and a blessing is promised to those who read, understand, and act on the truths revealed.

According to Revelation 1:5, 6, Jesus is the One who “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (*NKJV*). In Christ we are forgiven. Grace pardons our past, empowers our present, and provides hope for our future. That is, in Christ we are delivered from sin’s penalty and power, and one day soon we will be delivered from sin’s presence. This is the message of the Bible’s last book, Revelation.

And it also is an urgent message, first pictured as an angel flying swiftly in midheaven having the “everlasting gospel.”

*The gospel?* Salvation by faith in Christ? Christ’s atoning death for us? The promise of eternal life, not because of what we can do but because of what Christ has done for us? All this is at the beginning of the three angels’ messages? Exactly!

No wonder, then, that they are grace-filled messages full of hope and promise for us as broken and suffering beings.

**Though it’s easy to focus on the beasts and warnings of the last days, as depicted in Revelation, how can we learn to balance all these out with what is, undeniably, the most important message of Revelation: Christ’s self-sacrificing death in our behalf?**

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## The “Everlasting” Gospel

Notice what Revelation 14:6, the beginning of the three angels’ messages, starts with: the “eternal” or “everlasting” gospel. If we fail to understand the depth of the gospel, we will miss the entire point of the three angels’ messages. We can never fully understand the issues in God’s judgment-hour message or the fall of Babylon or the mark of the beast if we fail to understand the gospel.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Romans 3:24–26, and Romans 5:6–8. How is the “everlasting gospel” presented in these texts? What great hope is presented here for us?**

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The gospel is the incredibly good news of Christ’s death for our sins, His glorious resurrection, and His ever-present love and concern for us. By faith in His shed blood and His resurrection power, we are delivered from both sin’s penalty and power. Christ absorbed the apostle Paul’s thoughts and was at the center of his teaching and preaching. The crucified Christ redeemed him from the condemnation and guilt of his past. The resurrected Christ gave him power for the present, and the returning Christ gave him hope for the future.

Notice four points in these passages in Romans:

1. We are justified freely by grace.
2. Grace is a declaration of God’s righteousness.
3. Grace justifies those who by faith accept Jesus.
4. God’s love was demonstrated for us while we were yet sinners.

Christ’s grace is unmerited, undeserved, and unearned. Jesus died the agonizing, painful death that lost sinners will die. He experienced the fullness of the Father’s wrath, or judgment, against sin. He was rejected so that we could be accepted. He died the death that was ours, so we could live the life that was His.

Any wonder, then, that salvation must be by faith and without the deeds of the law? What could we possibly add? What could our works, even the best-intentioned, Holy Spirit–filled works, add to what Christ had done for us at the cross?

And this plan, the plan of salvation, had been put in place even before the beginning of time (*2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 1:2, Eph. 1:4*), which helps explain why it is called “the everlasting” gospel. Before the world was created, God knew what would happen, and so He instituted the plan of salvation to meet the crisis when it, eventually, would come.

## A Story of Grace

The three angels’ messages are a story of grace. They are the story of a Savior’s love beyond measure—a story of Jesus who loves us so much that He would rather experience hell itself than have one of us lost. They are the story of a boundless, unfathomable, incomprehensible, undying, unending, infinite love.

God is never caught by surprise. He is not subject to the changing winds of humanity’s choices. As we have already seen, His plan to deliver us from the domain of sin was not some afterthought when sin reared its ugly head. God was not caught off guard by the awful drama of sin.

**Read Revelation 13:8 and 1 Peter 1:18–20. What do these verses teach us about the plan of salvation?**

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The phrase “everlasting gospel” in Revelation 14:6 speaks of the past, the present, and the future. When God created humans with the capacity to make moral choices, He anticipated that they would make errant choices. Once His creatures had the capacity to choose, they had the capacity to rebel against His loving nature. The only way to avoid this reality would be to create robot beings controlled and manipulated by some divine cosmic plan. Forced allegiance is contrary to God’s very nature. Love requires choice, and once beings are given the power of choice, the possibility of making the wrong choices exists. Therefore, the plan of salvation was conceived in the mind of God before our first parents’ rebellion in Eden.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

The “eternal gospel” speaks not only of the past and present—but it also is the basis of a future with hope. It speaks of living eternally with the One whose heart is aching to be with us forever.

**Read Ephesians 1:4. Think about what it means that, even before the “foundation of the world,” you had been “chosen” in Christ to have salvation in Him. Why should you find this truth so encouraging?**

## Into All the World

**Read** Revelation 14:6 again. What is the extent of the proclamation of the everlasting gospel, and why is the answer important to us and our mission and calling as a church?

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According to the urgent, end-time message of the first of these three angels, the “everlasting gospel” is to be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. Here is a mission so grand, so large, so great, and so comprehensive that it is all-consuming. It demands our best efforts and requires our total commitment. It leads us from a pre-occupation with our own self-interest to a passion for Christ’s service. It inspires us with something larger than ourselves and leads us out of the narrow confines of our own minds to a grander vision.

**Read** Matthew 28:19, 20. How do these verses dovetail with the first angel’s message?

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In his book *A Quest for More: Living for Something Bigger Than You*, Paul David Tripp discusses the psychological need of every human being to be part of something larger than themselves: “Human beings were created to be part of something bigger than their own lives. Sin causes us to shrink our lives down to the size of our lives. The grace of Christ is given to rescue us from the claustrophobic confines of our own little self-focused kingdom and frees us to live for the eternal purposes and satisfying delights of the kingdom of God.”—B&B Media Group, “Living for Something Bigger Than Yourself,” n.d., <https://www.cbn.com/entertainment/books/questformore.aspx?mobile=false&u=1&option=print>.

There is nothing more inspiring, more fulfilling, more rewarding than being part of a divine movement, providentially raised up by God to accomplish a task far bigger, far larger, than any one human being could ever accomplish on their own. The commission given by God described in Revelation 14 is the greatest task ever committed to His church. It is an earnest appeal to give our lives to heaven’s grandest task to reveal God’s incomprehensible love just before Jesus’ return.

**What has been your own experience in being involved in something bigger than yourself? How does that experience help you understand the point of this day’s study? Also, what could be bigger than being used by the Creator of the cosmos to make an eternal difference in the universe?**

## A Mission Movement

Through a perceptive, deep study of the Bible, the early Adventists had a growing understanding of the significance of these messages. They sensed that God had a message tailor-made for this generation—an urgent, end-time message that must be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, in order to prepare the world for Christ’s return. The messages of the three angels have been the motivation for Adventist missions since its beginnings.

In 1874, the General Conference sent out our first missionary to Europe. Ellen G. White called John Andrews “the ablest man in our ranks.” Andrews spoke at least seven languages, could repeat the New Testament from memory, and knew most of the Old Testament. He was a brilliant scholar, a prolific writer, a powerful preacher, and a competent theologian.

Why send a man like that to a place where there were very few believers? Why send “the ablest man” you had to an unknown mission field? And why was he willing to go? His wife had died a few years earlier. Why would he be willing to leave family and friends behind in America and sail with his two children to an unknown land, risking all for the cause of Christ?

There is only one reason. He believed that Jesus was coming soon, that the message of end-time truth must go to the entire world.

Throughout our history, our brightest and our best have traveled to the ends of the earth to proclaim God’s last-day message. They were teachers, medical personnel, pastors, farmers, mechanics, carpenters, and tradesmen of all types. Some were denominational employees, but many were not. They were laypeople who believed Jesus was coming soon.

**Read** Revelation 14:6, Acts 1:8, and Matthew 24:14. What similarity do you see in these verses?

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The preaching of the everlasting gospel leaps across geographical boundaries. It penetrates earth’s remotest areas. It reaches people of every language and culture. Eventually, it will impact the entire world. How fascinating to know that our message has, so far, reached more than 210 of the world’s 235 countries recognized by the United Nations.

**What role could you play, and how could you better play it, in helping spread the three angels’ messages to every “nation, kindred, tongue, and people”?**

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**Further Thought:** Dwell more on the idea of Wednesday’s study about our need to be part of something bigger than ourselves and our meager, short-lived, often corrupt, damaged, and disappointing lives (who doesn’t have some of those things in their existence?). This desire makes so much sense, too. Physically, what are we but small packets of flesh carrying around our own brains—a couple of pounds of carbon-based organic material closer in composition to a bucket of fried chicken than to a hard drive.

What can these small, self-contained packets of meat mean in contrast to the infinity that surrounds them? To live only for yourself, to live for something no bigger than yourself, when there’s so much all around us and beyond us, is like being locked for life in solitary confinement amid a large city that you can feel vibrating through the walls. And what larger, grander, and more glorious and consequential thing could we live for than proclaiming the promise of eternal life that we have been given in Jesus?

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 1, 1890. What relationship does justification by faith have to the three angels’ messages?
- 2 Dwell more on the phrase “everlasting gospel.” What is everlasting about the gospel?
- 3 What does it mean that Seventh-day Adventists are in so many countries of the world? What does it say about how God, so far, has blessed our efforts? At the same time, how can your local church, even your local Sabbath School, play a larger role in “finishing the work”?

## Pink Hair and God

By Andrew McChesney

Days before the start of the school year, a mother called the principal of a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school for help in Ukraine.

“I don’t understand anything about religion, and I don’t know anything about religious denominations,” the mother said. “I just saw the sign outside your school reading, ‘Christian school,’ and I’m absolutely certain that this is what I have been looking for.”

The principal was intrigued by the call and asked for more information. She learned that the caller was the mother of a little girl named Natasha.

The mother said that when she had been pregnant with Natasha, she had often thought about sending her child to a church school one day. The persistent idea puzzled her because she was an atheist. When Natasha reached school age, the mother enrolled her in a private school that promised to nurture creativity in an atmosphere of complete freedom and no discipline. Natasha’s mother became alarmed when the girl announced in the second grade that she wanted to dye her hair pink. That summer, she worried that the lack of discipline might hurt her daughter’s future. Then she saw the sign for the Adventist school, remembered her thoughts when she was pregnant, and thought, *I want my child to go to this school.*

On the first day of school, Natasha started third grade in a class with five other children, all from Adventist families. She struggled at first to catch up with the other children, but she quickly gained ground. Reading the Bible and participating in morning devotions were new experiences for her. Wide-eyed, she eagerly absorbed everything she learned about God.

Several weeks into the school year, her mother called the principal to say she was delighted with the changes that had come over her daughter.

“She loves your Bible lessons, and she has fallen in love with the school,” she said. “She tells us everything that goes on there and has us pray before meals. I am so happy I brought her to your school!”

Not long ago, the mother contacted the principal to ask for information about Adventist beliefs. “Natasha wants to become an Adventist, and I would like to know what changes need to be made in our lives,” she said. “I also want to become an Adventist.”




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*The family’s story has not ended. “Their path with God is just beginning,” said Ivan Riapolov (pictured), education director of the Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine. Thank you for your mission offerings that support Adventist education around the world.*



## ***Part I: Overview***

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In this week's study, we begin a detailed study of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12. Throughout Scripture, angels are portrayed as messengers of God. In the book of Revelation, angels flying in midair represent a heavenly message of divine origin, swiftly carried to the ends of the earth. These messages, of course, are to be proclaimed by God's last-day people.

Just before the coming of Jesus, the message of the everlasting gospel, in the context of the judgment, speedily spans the globe. One of the focal points of this week's study is to discover the depths of the gospel message. What is the gospel? Why is it called everlasting? Why must every human being on planet Earth be given the opportunity to respond to the gospel? Why does the salvation of each person, living in the last days of this earth's history, depend upon his or her response? This week's study will answer these questions and provide an in-depth understanding of the expression "the everlasting gospel."

A second feature of this week's study will be bettering our understanding of Christ's mission to His last-day church. The angel flying in midheaven with the everlasting gospel proclaims this end-time truth to "every nation, tribe, and tongue, and people" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). There is a largeness to this message. It calls us to give our best for the kingdom of God. It invites us to cooperate with Christ in His final appeal to humanity. This message appeals to us to place priority on God's mission of redeeming lost humanity because that is where His priority is.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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God places His identifiable stamp of approval on His people to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. In the days of ancient Israel, when the heathen nations around them were polytheists who worshiped multiple gods, Israel's clear, identifiable, powerful statement of faith was found in Deuteronomy 6:4, also known as the Shema.

Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, Jewish families repeated: " 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!' " (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*).

" 'Hear, O Israel.' " Throughout the centuries of their exile, the chanting of the Shema reminded Jews of the spiritual vision and path that united them as a people. The chanting of the Shema also strengthened the people's resolve to resist the various attempts to force them to abandon their spiritual vision and path.

Deuteronomy 6:4 was one of the first verses that a Jewish child in ancient Israel was taught as soon as he or she learned how to speak. In addition, Jewish mothers continually taught their young children to chant the Shema before going to sleep.

There is an amazing example of the power of this faith identity point that took place immediately after the Second World War ended in 1945. Some leading rabbis visited Christian orphanages in search of Jewish children. During the war, many Jewish parents in Europe had placed their children in Christian orphanages to save them from the Nazis. It was the hope of these parents that they would later be reunited with their children after the war. If they (the parents) did not survive, they hoped that surviving relatives or friends would find their children.

After the war, most of the priests and nuns who ran these orphanages were unwilling to release the Jewish children back into the custody of their families. The priests and nuns often denied that they had any Jewish children in residence. During one visit, a leading rabbi asked the priest in charge of an orphanage to allow him to return in the evening when the children were going to sleep. The priest reluctantly agreed to the rabbi's request. When the rabbi returned, he entered the children's room, and as he walked through the aisles of beds, he chanted the Hebrew words of the Shema. One by one, children burst into tears and cried out, "Mama!" Many repeated the words of the Shema. The priests were caught completely by surprise. They were unable to erase these children's memories of their Jewish mothers putting them to bed every night with the Shema on their lips. The head priest had no choice but to admit that he was "mistaken"; thus, these lost children of Israel were able to return "home" to their people and to their Torah.

Burned into the consciousness of these children, indelibly impressed upon their minds, were those words that confirmed their Jewish identity. " 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one!' " (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*).

### **The Three Angels' Messages: Our Rallying Point**

For Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels' messages in Revelation 14 are our Shema—our rallying point. They are our identifying statement of faith. They define who we are as a people and describe our mission to the world.

We find our unique prophetic identity outlined in Revelation 14:6–12, and it is here that we find our passion to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. Ellen G. White puts it this way: "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second,

and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19.

These messages are urgent, eternal, and universal. At their heart is the everlasting gospel. What is the gospel? It is the eternal good news of Christ's life, death, resurrection, high priestly ministry, and soon return. It is the good news that Jesus saves us from our sin and empowers us to overcome. To understand the gospel is to grasp the significance of God's undying, unfathomable, exhaustless love for us. The gospel begins in the heart of God. Before we have reached out to Him, He is reaching out to us. Before we ever sought Him, He was seeking us. Before we ever made one move toward Him, He was drawing us to Himself through the power of His love. The apostle John attests to this truth in these memorable words: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (*1 John 4:10, NKJV*). In Romans 5, the apostle Paul adds, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*).

In the gospel, God, in Christ, takes the initiative in our salvation. Christ lived the perfect life we should have lived, died the death we should have died, draws us to Himself through the Holy Spirit, and, through His love, grace, and power, transforms our lives. Through the Cross, sin's hold on our lives is broken. By receiving God's grace, accepting His sacrifice, and believing His promise of eternal life, we become His sons and daughters.

This message of the everlasting gospel is at the heart of the three angels' messages. These end-time messages are all about Jesus. They lead us to abandon all human pride and self-righteousness. They compel us to trust Jesus completely for our salvation. They lead us by faith to accept His righteousness in the place of our unrighteous behavior. The perfection of Christ's life is ours when we receive Him as our crucified Redeemer. The gospel invites us to come to Jesus just as we are, but it does not leave us there. In response to Jesus' love, we will desire to live godly lives. His grace not only covers our past, but it also works as a dynamic principle in our lives, empowering us to obey. The apostle Paul makes this point clear in Romans 1:5: "Through Him [Jesus] we have received grace and apostleship for obedience" (*NKJV*). The grace of God teaches us that we should "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (*Titus 2:12, NKJV*). This is the incredibly good news of the gospel.

When we are saved by His grace, charmed by His love, and changed by His power, our natural response is to share with others what Christ has done for us. Our Christian witness is the overflow of a heart filled

with God's love. When the gospel breaks our hard, sin-polluted hearts, we long to tell the story of His grace. Understanding the everlasting gospel is the very foundation of our witness to the world. The gospel of Revelation 14:6 that is proclaimed to the ends of the earth is a gospel that each one of us has experienced personally in our own lives. The heart of this week's study is understanding the gospel, experiencing the gospel, and sharing the gospel in the context of Christ's soon return.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Personal Reflection:** As you have studied this lesson together with your students, it is possible that many of your class members have wondered about their own salvation. Perhaps they have lacked the assurance that their sins are forgiven. Maybe they have experienced some deep sorrows in life and asked, "Where was God when we were going through the dark valleys?" Or is it possible that your students are struggling with some hidden habit or negative attitude that they seem unable to overcome?

Remind your students that the gospel is for everyone. The Christ that died for others, died for them too. His love is for each of His children. So is His grace and His power.

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud this quotation from Ellen G. White: "Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 52. This is the beauty of the gospel. We need not fear. Jesus does not stand with the whipping belt of guilt to condemn us. He stands with arms wide open to encircle us in His love, to forgive us, empower us, and send us out as mighty witnesses for Him in these last days to testify of the glory of His grace.

Ask your students to privately reflect on the following questions in class and throughout the coming week:

- 1. Do I have the assurance of salvation right now at this moment? If yes, why? If not, what is keeping me from believing that Jesus is waiting to bind up my wounds and encircle me in His arms of love?**

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2. How have I served this week as a witness to others of God's forgiveness, mercy, and love? What else can I do to share His grace with people in my sphere?

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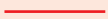
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