LOSING ALL

Israel's clear, identifiable, and powerful statement of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, set them firmly apart from the polytheistic heathens around them: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

Throughout the centuries the chanting of the Shema, which is the name of the prayer in Deuteronomy 6 (based on the Hebrew word for “hear”), reminded the Jews of the spiritual vision that united them as a people and 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 through the eyes of grace as we listen to God speaking to our hearts.
Write out Revelation 14:6 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
Week Three
Three Cosmic Messages

Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas
Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you
Draw Arrows to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse.
Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

How is grace more than just forgiveness? How is grace more than transformative power?

What are some areas in your life that demonstrate God’s grace?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/3am03-3

A STORYBOOK OF GRACE

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. Even amid the scary beasts and warnings of persecution and hard times ahead, God still gives us reasons to rejoice in His salvation.

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 a 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 has “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.” In Christ we are forgiven. Grace pardons our past, empowers our present, and provides hope for our future. 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 last book of the Bible.

It is also an urgent message, first depicted as an angel flying swiftly in midheaven carrying the “everlasting gospel.” 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, 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?

These messages of hope and grace are also the story of a Savior’s immeasurable love; the 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, incomprehensible, undying, 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 an afterthought. God was not caught off guard by the awful drama of sin when it reared its ugly head for the first time.

The phrase “everlasting gospel” in Revelation 14:6 speaks of the past, the present, and the future. When God created humanity with the capacity to make moral choices, He anticipated that they would make errant ones. 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 wrong decisions exists. God had therefore conceived the plan of salvation before our first parents’ rebellion in Eden. As Ellen White puts it: “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after (cont. on p. 29)
A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

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 and comprehensive that it is all-consuming. It demands our best effort and requires our total commitment. It leads us from a preoccupation 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.

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, describing it in an interview as follows: “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” (“Living for Something Bigger Than Yourself,” interview by the B&B Media Group, *The Christian Broadcasting Network* [n.d.], www.cbn.com/entertainment/books/questformore.aspx?mobile=false&u=1&option=print).

There is nothing more inspiring, more fulfilling, or more rewarding than being part of a divine movement, raised up by God to accomplish a task far larger than any one human being could ever accomplish on their own. The heavenly commission described in Revelation 14 is the greatest task ever assigned to God's church. What could be bigger than being used by the Creator of the cosmos to make an eternal difference in the universe? It is an earnest appeal to commit our lives to heaven's grandest task: revealing God's incomprehensible love to the world before Jesus' return.

Through a perceptive, deep study of the Bible, the early Adventists gained 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 to prepare the world for Christ's return. The messages of the three angels have been the motivation for Adventist missions since their beginning.

In 1874 the General Conference sent our first missionary to Europe. Ellen 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 is coming soon, that the message of end-time truth must go to the entire world, and that it must not be delayed any longer.
Review your memorized verse from Revelation 14:6.

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What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 14:6?

1 Corinthians 15:1–4
Romans 3:24–26
1 Peter 1:18–20
Matthew 28:19, 20
Acts 1:8

(Cont. from inGest, p. 27):

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” (The Desire of Ages [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898, 1940], p. 22).

The “eternal gospel” speaks not only of the past and present; it 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.

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 28):

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 is coming soon.

The preaching of the everlasting gospel leaps across geographical boundaries. It penetrates earth’s remotest areas. It reaches people of every language and culture. It will eventually 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.
THE “EVERLASTING” GOSPEL

Notice what Revelation 14:6, the beginning of the three angels' messages, begins 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, the fall of Babylon, or the mark of the beast if we do not understand the gospel.

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 resurrection, we are delivered from both sin's penalty and power. Christ consumed 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. And, praise God, He does the same for us.

Christ's grace is undeserved and unearned. Jesus died the agonizing 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 that we can live the life that was His.

This plan, the plan of salvation, was 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. God knew what would happen before the world had even been created, so He instituted the plan of salvation to meet the crisis head-on.
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* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 612.)

All who receive the gospel message into the heart will long to proclaim it. The heaven-born love of Christ must find expression. Those who have put on Christ will relate their experience, tracing step by step the leadings of the Holy Spirit—their hungering and thirsting for the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent, the results of their searching of the Scriptures, their prayers, their soul agony, and the words of Christ to them, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” It is unnatural for any to keep these things secret, and those who are filled with the love of Christ will not do so. In proportion as the Lord has made them the depositaries of sacred truth will be their desire that others shall receive the same blessing. And as they make known the rich treasures of God’s grace, more and still more of the grace of Christ will be imparted to them. They will have the heart of a little child in its simplicity and unreserved obedience. Their souls will pant after holiness, and more and more of the treasures of truth and grace will be revealed to them to be given to the world. (Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1900, 1941], 125.)

In commissioning His disciples to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” Christ assigned to men the work of extending the knowledge of His grace. But while some go forth to preach, He calls upon others to answer His claims upon them for offerings with which to support His cause in the earth. He has placed means in the hands of men, that His divine gifts may flow through human channels in doing the work appointed us in saving our fellow men. This is one of God’s ways of exalting man. It is just the work that man needs, for it will stir the deepest sympathies of his heart and call into exercise the highest capabilities of the mind. (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1909], vol. 9, 255.)

It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ’s grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. The gospel we present for the saving of souls must be the gospel by which our own souls are saved. Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. If we would draw sinners out of the swift-running current, our own feet must be firmly set upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian. (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1905], 469, 470.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How does the gospel give meaning and purpose to our meager, short-lived, often corrupt, damaged, and disappointing lives (who doesn’t have some of those things in their existence?).

What does it mean that Seventh-day Adventists are in so many countries of the world? What does it say about how God has so far blessed our efforts? At the same time, how can your local church or even your local Sabbath School play a larger role in “finishing the work”?

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 week’s study?

What could be bigger than being used by the Creator of the cosmos to make an eternal difference in the universe?