

Ellen G. White Estate

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE

THE REMNANT

What is the universal church?

STEP 22 OF 28



My Journey to Life, Step 22

Foreword

My Journey to Life will give you the keys for finding peace of mind, harmony of body, and success in relationships. Every step will transform your outlook as you unpack each lesson. We pray they will help you to fall in love with the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. So together, let's walk the pathway step-by-step to a new life in Jesus.

Preface

In the final days of Earth's history, a specific group of people is given a special responsibility: to spread the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 throughout the world. These people possess unique qualifications. Who are they, and what is the meaning of "the remnant?"

Step Twenty-two—The Remnant and Its Mission

What is the universal church? "The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness." — *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 185

Bible Discovery: Isaiah 1:9; 11:11; Jeremiah 23:3; Daniel 7:9-14; Micah 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 1:3, 14; Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, November 8, 1899, par. 2

1. What is the remnant? In Revelation, John describes the dragon's battle with the woman and her descendants using the phrase "the rest of her offspring" (Revelation 12:17). That expression means "remaining ones." The remnant, then, are the small group of people through the ages who have remained loyal to God through persecution, calamities, wars, and apostasy. We could say that this faithful remnant was the rootstock God used to propagate His visible church on earth.

Bible Discovery: 2 Chronicles 30:6; Ezra 9:14, 15; Isaiah 10:20-22; Jeremiah 42:2; Ezekiel 6:8; 14:22; John 15:10

Further Reading: Ellen White, 14MR 161.3; *Review and Herald*, April 12, 1898, par. 19

2. When did the remnant begin to appear? Although the remnant motif reaches from Genesis to Revelation, the primary focus of this study are God’s loyal witnesses in the last days before Christ’s second coming. The Bible indicates that this eschatological remnant appears on the world’s stage after the time of great persecution described in Revelation 12:14-17. To vent his anger, Satan began persecuting the woman—the church (Revelation 12:13), particularly throughout the 1260 days (prophetic years) of persecution which began in 538 AD and ended in 1798 AD. The “wilderness,” or sparsely populated areas of the earth, provided a refuge for God’s faithful during those years of persecution.

At the end of this wilderness experience, which culminated in 1798, God’s people emerged with a renewed interest in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. John identifies this faithful group as “the remnant . . . which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The devil pours out his wrath on this small group of believers who choose to keep God’s commandments in the face of great apostasy.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 12:3; 32:28; Exodus 4:23; 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 6:5; 7:6-9; 27:9, 10; Jeremiah 31:7, 31-34; Hosea 12 3, 4, 6; Romans 11:5; Revelation 12:17; 17:15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 197.1-2; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 535.2

3. What correlation is there between “the man of sin” and “the remnant?” The persecution of the Christian church was brought about at first by pagan Rome, then by apostasy within the church of Rome. This was predicted by Christ, Paul, and John. Although apostasy was already at work in a limited way in Paul’s time, it wasn’t until the bishop of Rome was freed from the control of the Ostrogoths in 538 AD, that church and state were decidedly united in an unholy alliance.

Compromises between Christianity and paganism led to the formation of the “man of sin,” a gigantic system of false religion mixing truth and error. Under the leadership of the papacy, pagans joined the church in name only, bringing their pagan practices with them.

In a bold move for power and control, the church, with the assistance of the state, tried to force its decrees and teachings on all Christians. The remnant, who held to the authority of the Bible over the traditions of the church, experienced great suffering and many were killed. The grossly distorted view of God’s character by these actions of the church in the Middle Ages, as well as the doctrines of purgatory and eternal torment, led many to reject Christianity altogether.

Although the pope of the Roman church is the predicted “man of sin,” there are many faithful believers in Christ within that system. They have accepted Christ as Savior and are following Him to the best of their ability according to the knowledge they have. With other faithful members in all Christian churches, this group constitutes an invisible remnant. Before the second coming of Jesus, they will hear the call of Revelation 18:4 to “Come out of [Babylon], my people” and join the visible remnant church of God described in Revelation 12:17.

Bible discovery: Matthew 24:21, 22; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4; Revelation 1:9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 565.3; *Review and Herald*, April 14, 1896, par. 7

4. In what sense does today's "remnant" build on the Protestant Reformation? Protestant reformers cried out against the corruption, relentless persecution of dissenters, and spiritual decline of many of the clergy of the Catholic church. They opposed the teaching of unbiblical doctrines such as the head of the church on earth is the vicar of Christ, the eclipse of Christ's high-priestly mediatorial ministry by popes and priests, the substitution of the mass for the Lord's Supper, good works as a means of salvation, penance, and indulgences, and that the church, not the Bible, was the final spiritual authority. Protestants also objected to prayers for the dead, veneration of saints and relics, celebration of the mass, worship of Mary, purgatory, and the elevation of tradition over the word of God.

Today's remnant builds on the reforms that were made in the 15th and 16th centuries, while continuing to elevate Scripture over the traditions of humanity.

Bible Discovery: Exodus 20:8-11; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; Daniel 7:8, 20-25; 8:9-12; John 14:15; 16:13; Revelation 18:4, 5

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 22, 1910, par. 9; *Review and Herald*, February 6, 1900, Art A, par. 14

5. What is "the remnant's" responsibility? Just as Israel existed as a religious community that found its unity and mission in revealing the character of God as found in His law, so today's remnant finds its mission in preaching the end-time threefold warning message of Revelation 14 just before Christ's return.

God's remnant will proclaim the everlasting gospel of salvation by faith in Christ. They will warn the world that the hour of God's judgment has arrived, and they will prepare others to meet their soon-coming Lord. They will be engaged in a worldwide mission to declare the all sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ and how to be clothed with His purity and holiness to be accepted at the "wedding feast" (Matthew 22:1-14).

Bible Discovery: Psalm 150:6; Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:1-3; Daniel 8:14; 12:4; Matthew 24:14; Revelation 10:11; 12:17; 14:6, 7, 12

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 5, 1910, par.1; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.5; 15LtMs, *Letter 79*, 1900, par. 32

6. What is the message of the first angel of Revelation 14? The three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 are the heart of the gospel message. Just before Jesus returns (See Step #6, The Second Coming), Satan will deploy an overwhelming deception over the whole world. The messages of the three angels are God's answer to this satanic deception and His last warning message to Planet Earth.

The message of the first angel (Revelation 14:6, 7) calls for God's remnant to carry the everlasting gospel to the world. This gospel is the same good news of God's infinite love that ancient prophets and apostles proclaimed. "The judgment has come" reaffirms the gospel

message that repentant sinners can be justified by faith and receive Christ's righteousness.

The judgment message of the first angel uses the same language as the fourth commandment to provide a basis for worshipping the Creator—His acts of creation described in Genesis 1 and 2, culminating in the “sabbath of solemn rest” (see Leviticus 23:27-32). God's call to worship on the day He set aside as holy must be seen in contrast to the summons to worship the beast and his image (Revelation 13:3, 8, 15) by honoring Sunday, the counterfeit sabbath. In contrast, the first angel's message calls for the world to restore God's true day of worship. Its message presents Christ as the Creator and Lord of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Daniel 7:9-14; Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 4:2; 9:27; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 20:11-15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 491.1; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 933.14

7. What is the message of the second angel of Revelation 14? The second angel states succinctly, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14:8). From early history the city of Babylon symbolized defiance of God, apostasy and rebellion. Lucifer was its invisible king. Throughout the Bible, Babylon represents the enemy of God's people and the struggle between God's city, Jerusalem, and Satan's city, Babylon, illustrating the conflict between good and evil. In the last days, Babylon falls because she rejects the first angel's message—the gospel of righteousness by faith in the Creator God who sanctified the seventh-day Sabbath (Ezekiel 20:12, 20).

The second angel's message will have increasing relevance as Jesus' coming draws near. “Babylon is fallen” will meet its complete fulfillment with the alliance of the various religious organizations to legislate observance of Sunday, the counterfeit Sabbath.

Says the angel, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). This “loud cry” message is the final call for God's people to separate from every vestige of Babylon. Every individual will have to choose between being a follower of the Lamb or a follower of the beast. This last appeal by the remnant of God to “come out of Babylon” is the dramatic antitype of all the biblical commands to flee God's judgement.

Bible discovery: Genesis 19:14-17; Isaiah 14:4, 12-14; 21:9; Jeremiah 51:6, 7; Ezekiel 16:15; Matthew 23:25, 32; 24:15, 16; Romans 10:13; James 4:4; 2 Peter 2:5; Revelation 17:1-18

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 390.1

8. What is the message of the third angel of Revelation 14? The third angel's message (Revelation 14:9-12) contains perhaps the most startling, urgent and solemn warning in all of Scripture. The message graphically describes the terrible results of choosing to worship the beast (the papal system) and his image (the end-time union of church and state that mandates Sunday observance).

The mark of the beast comes from choosing to honor the counterfeit Sabbath promoted by the papacy and its allies instead of the seventh-day Sabbath which God Himself sanctified as the day of worship. This warning is so important that the next section of the book of Revelation focuses on explaining its significance. God will send His wrath in the form of seven last plagues on those who reject the messages of the three angels. Those who choose to align themselves against Jesus Christ and His designated day of worship can no longer be covered with His mercy and protection.

In contrast to the majority who reject God’s everlasting gospel, the last verse of the message focuses on the patience of the saints who do keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12) and receive His seal. This faithful remnant receives the message of the righteousness of Christ and are prepared to receive the seal of God (Revelation 9:4) which shields them from Satan and his allies. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22). But in a special sense the seventh-day Sabbath is a sign or seal of our connection with God (Ezekiel 2:12). It contains the three elements of an official seal – the name, title, and jurisdiction of “The One” who the seal represents. Sunday, the man changed Sabbath, will be the mark of the beast (Revelation 13: 17). The great question which comes down through all ages is—will we submit to human authority in earth’s final crisis and receive the mark by worshipping the beast and his image, or will we remain faithful to God and worship Him on the correct day—the seventh-day Sabbath? This special day was instituted by God Himself as a memorial of His creation and will continue to be worshipped on throughout all eternity.

Bible Discovery: Deuteronomy 5:29; Ezekiel 9:8; Zechariah 3:12, 13; John 4:24; Romans 2:12-16; Revelation 1:13; 2:13; 4:11; 7:2-4; 12:17; 14:1, 20:14

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 352.1; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 979.11, 12; *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 9, p. 229.3

9. What connection is there between Israel as the chosen covenant people of God and the concept of the end-time remnant? From Genesis to Revelation, the emphasis is on God’s desire to establish covenant relationship with the people He loves with an everlasting love and for whom He died. The election of Israel as the chosen covenant people of God was not to establish an exclusive group that God preferred over other people groups, but rather to establish a visible sign of the benefits of remaining in covenant relationship with God.

Christ formed the “new Israel” by calling the disciples to be the little flock who would receive the kingdom. Christ’s church is now the faithful Israel who is the recipient of the covenant promises made to the Old Testament Israel. The relationship that God longed to have with ancient Israel is the same connection He seeks to establish with His faithful remnant today. All who accept Jesus and live by the principles of His law are the recipients of the promises He made to the patriarchs. As God redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage, so He desires to redeem us from sin and Satan and bind us exclusively to Himself. Just as ancient Israel was to reveal the merciful Yahweh embodied in the Torah, so today’s remnant is to demonstrate God’s character of love and mercy.

Bible Discovery: Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 6:5; 7:6-9; Ezekiel 5:5; Matthew 8:11, 12; Luke 12:32; Romans 10:13; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Peter 2:9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.5; *The Ministry of Health and Healing*, p. 251.3; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 713.1

10. Does literal Israel today have end-time remnant significance? The faithful remnant of God today is those who believe in the Messiah and maintain an active covenant relationship with God. When the Jews as a nation rejected Jesus as Messiah, God formed a new Israel, the Messianic remnant, and called them “my church” (Matthew 16:18). This group of true descendants of Abraham, defined not by blood but by faith, became the recipients of all the covenantal promises made to ancient Israel. These promises were not to be fulfilled to another future generation of Jews, but rather to Christ-believing people from all races and nations. Thus, Christ’s church replaced the Christ-rejecting nation.

Bible Discovery: Isaiah 5:37; Jeremiah 2:21; Daniel 7:27; Hosea 13:9; 14:1; Matthew 21:31-44; 23:32, 37, 38; Luke 12:32; 19:42-44; John 10:16; Romans 9:32, 33; 10:9, 10, 12, 13; 11:7, 17-24; Galatians 3:29

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 20.3; PH114 p. 8.3

11. Who is today’s remnant? Throughout history, only those who worshiped God according to His covenant were the faithful remnant (1 Kings 19:18; Amos 3:2; 9:7-10). Just as the Old Testament prophets distinguished between an apostate Israel and a faithful remnant within national Israel, so the Bible gives us a clear definition of who are God’s faithful remnant just before He comes.

This eschatological remnant that includes non-Israelites (Isaiah 11:10, 11) would be a religious rather than a political community who live out the power of God’s “new covenant” in humility and purity of heart. They will keep the commandments of God (Revelation 14:12) and have the gift of prophecy in their midst (Revelation 12:17; 19:10). None of them will retain any vestige of Babylon (Revelation 14:4; 17:7) and will refuse to compromise with antichrist powers by worshipping on the counterfeit sabbath (Sunday). They do not claim exclusive status with God. Instead, they are consumed with love for the people for whom Christ died which drives them to share the final gospel message of Christ’s righteousness. Giving glory to God as Creator also leads the remnant to recognize their accountability for the well-being of the human body and mind as the temple of God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Some who had been Millerite Adventists of the mid-19th century came to understand that Christ’s final cleansing ministry in the Most Holy Place of heaven’s sanctuary (see Step 5, The Sanctuary) mandated a worldwide proclamation of the everlasting gospel (Revelation 3:8; 19:9-11).

Early on, the Seventh-day Adventist church developed three key biblical teachings: Christ’s final intercessory ministry in heaven’s sanctuary, the seventh-day Sabbath as a sign of loyalty to God, and the application of the phrase “testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17) to the prophetic gift of Ellen G. White (see Step 21, The Gift of Prophecy).

Adventists believe that the restored Sabbath is a biblical truth that counteracts evolution, one

of the key heresies of the end-time. As with God’s remnant through the ages, they have a mission to prepare people to meet God at His coming. But there is a special component to the end-time remnant’s mission—to call God’s invisible remnant out of “Babylon’s” apostasy to receive the fullness of God’s Spirit and escape the seven last plagues that will fall on those who receive the mark of the beast (Revelation 18:1-5).

Bible Discovery: Isaiah 6:13; Isaiah 56:8; Jeremiah 31:7, 31-34; Zephaniah. 3:9, 12, 13; John 10:16; 12:32; 14:15; Galatians 6:16; Revelation 12:17; 19:10

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Letter 54*, 1908, par. 12; 25, *Manuscript 53*, 1910, par.7; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 57.3

12. How do God’s end-time remnant ultimately triumph? Though God’s faithful church suffered greatly during the 1260 years of papal persecution (Revelation 12:14-16), Satan’s greatest fury is directed at those who are faithful to God just before His coming (Revelation 12:17 KJV). Those who obey God will experience the wrath of the dragon (Revelation 12:17) and eventually be threatened with death (Revelation 13:15), while those who choose to worship the beast and his image will incur the seven last plagues and finally “the lake of fire” (Revelation 15:1-8; 16:1-21; 20:14, 15).

While the choices of both involve suffering, their outcomes differ. Those who worship the Creator will escape the deadly wrath of the dragon and stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1; 7:2, 4), where He offers them eternal safety. Those who worship the beast and his image receive the full wrath of God (Revelation 14:9, 10; 20:14).

God has children in all churches, but through the remnant church He proclaims a message that is to restore His true worship by calling His people out of the apostasy of spiritual Babylon. The victory of the final remnant represents the culmination of Israel’s salvation history. While the pure woman representing God’s faithful church is rescued, the great “prostitute” of Revelation 17:1-18 is destroyed by her former lovers who supported the church and state union against the remnant people of God.

Considering the soon coming of Christ and the need to prepare to meet Him, God’s urgent, compassionate call comes home to each of us: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Revelation 18:4, 5).

Bible Discovery: Isaiah 4:3; 10:21; 28:5; Daniel 12:1-4; Joel 2:28-32; Micah 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 7:14-17; 14:1; 16:1, 2; 17:1, 2; 19:1-4

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 638.2

Recommended supplementary reading: *Studying Together*, by Mark Finley pp. 97-99; *The Gift of Prophecy*, by Gerhard Pfandl, pp. 38-47

Reflection...

The true remnant “obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17 NIV). Their victory over the anti-Christ comes because they have learned to trust Jesus fully, accepting His death and resurrection on their behalf. This repentant group will escape the deadly wrath of the dragon and stand together with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

Next Step...

As we learned in this lesson, the entire Scriptural narrative is concerned with God’s purpose of calling out a *people* for Himself, a remnant who enter a covenant relationship with Him through faith, love, and obedience. In our next lesson, we will explore this concept further and discover what it means for the church today.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between the universal church and the remnant church?
2. What is the task of the remnant church?
3. Is literal Israel the biblical remnant?

Further Reading

Official Adventist Website: <https://adventist.org/remnant-and-its-mission>

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Request a personal Bible study: <https://www.bibleschools.com/en/personal-studies>

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