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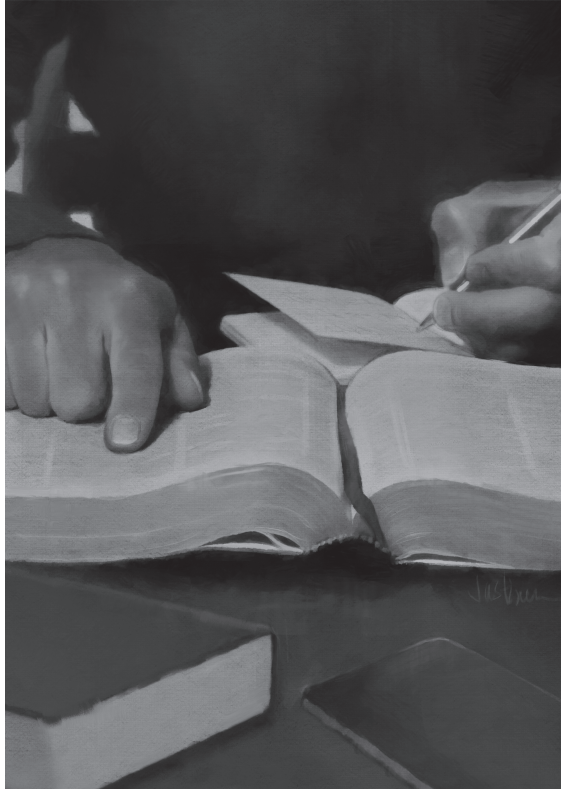
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How to Interpret Scripture



As Seventh-day Adventists, we are Protestants, which means that we believe in *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone as the sole authoritative foundation of our faith and doctrines. This is especially relevant in the last days, when, as Ellen G. White said, God will have “a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

Of course, we are not unique among Protestants in claiming “the Bible and the Bible alone” as the foundation of our faith, even though many who make that claim believe in such things as Sunday as the New Testament replacement for the seventh-day Sabbath; the immortality of the soul; eternal torment in hell for the lost; and even a secret rapture in which Jesus quietly and surreptitiously returns to the earth and snatches away the saved while everyone else is left wondering how those people could have disappeared.

In other words, just having the Bible, and claiming to believe it, is one thing, as important as that is. But, as the proliferation of false doctrines (all supposedly derived from Scripture) reveals, we need to know how to interpret the Bible correctly, as well.

Hence, the subject of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for this quarter, “How to Interpret Scripture.” In it, we begin with the assumption that Scripture, as the Word of God, is “the infallible revelation of His will” and “the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trust-

worthy record of God's acts in history.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 2nd ed. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 11. In short, Scripture is the foundational source of the truths that we believe and proclaim to the world. Or, as the Bible itself says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “All Scripture,” of course, means *all* Scripture—even the Scripture that we might not like; that might step on our toes; and that, to use contemporary parlance, might not be “politically correct.”

From this starting point, then, we will examine how the Bible teaches us to interpret itself. That is, rather than first going to such extra-biblical sources as science, philosophy, and history (which, if used correctly, can be a blessing), we will seek to uncover from within the

biblical texts the tools that reveal the great truths found in its sacred pages. We are told that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, *NKJV*). And we believe that among the things these “holy men of God spoke” are keys to helping us interpret the Word of God.

For instance, how did Paul or the Gospel writers interpret the Old Testament? If what they wrote was inspired by God, then certainly how they read and interpreted the Scriptures could be central to helping us learn to do the same, as well. And how did Jesus Himself use and interpret Scripture? We won't find a better example on how to read the Bible than from Jesus.

At the same time, we will explore our own presuppositions and reasoning about context, language, culture, and history and how they impact the way we read and understand the Word of God. How are we to interpret the parables, prophecies, sacred history, admonitions, songs of praise, prophetic visions, and dreams—the whole spectrum of inspired writing found in the Scriptures?

All these questions and more will be explored this quarter because, as doctrines such as eternal torment in hell or Sunday sacredness show, believing in the Bible itself isn't enough. We must learn how to interpret it, as well.

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*In short, Scripture
is the foundational
source of the truths
that we believe and
proclaim to the world.*

How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

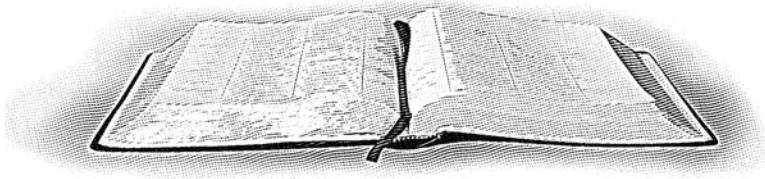
To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility—a privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is designed to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. The Overview** segment introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the teachers edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary segment also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. To facilitate participation, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

The Uniqueness *of the* Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 32:45–47; Gen. 49:8–12; Isa. 53:3–7; 1 Cor. 15:3–5, 51–55; Rom. 12:2.*

Memory Text: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalms 119:105, NKJV*).

Composed of 66 books, and written over 1,500 years on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) by more than forty authors, the Bible is unique. There is no other book, sacred or religious, like it. And no wonder. After all, it is the Word of God.

There are more than 24,600 extant New Testament manuscripts from the first four centuries after Christ. Of Plato's original manuscripts, there are seven, Herodotus eight, and Homer's *Iliad* slightly more with 263 surviving copies. Hence, we have powerful confirming evidence of the integrity of the New Testament text.

The Bible was the first book known to be translated, the first book in the West published on the printing press, and the first book to be so widely distributed in so many languages that it can be read by 95 percent of the earth's population today.

The Bible also is unique in its content and message, which focuses on God's redemptive acts in history. That history is intertwined with prophecy, as it foretells the future of God's plans and His eternal kingdom. It is the *living* Word of God, because the same Spirit of God through which Scripture was inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17*) is promised to believers today to guide us into all truth as we study the Word (*John 14:16, 17; John 15:26; John 16:13*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 4.

The Living Word of God

The most important words spoken are often the last words a person utters. Moses, the writer of the first five foundational books of the Bible, sings a song to the people just before his death (*Deut. 31:30–32:43*).

Read Deuteronomy 32:45–47. How does Moses describe the Word of God and its power in the lives of the Hebrews on the verge of entering the Promised Land?

Among the last words of Moses is a strong exhortation. By setting their hearts on the words that God has spoken to them through him, Moses wanted to stress to the people that their focus should remain on God and His will for their lives. By teaching these words to their children, each generation would pass on God’s covenant plan of salvation. Notice that they were not to pick and choose which words, but were to observe or obey “all the words of this law” (*Deut. 32:46*).

At the end of earth’s history, God will have a people who remain faithful to all of Scripture, which means keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). These people will remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible, for it not only ensures a richer life on earth but an eternal destiny in the home Jesus prepares for us (*John 14:1–3*).

Read John 1:1–5, 14 and John 14:6. What do these texts teach us about Jesus and eternal life? How does the Word made flesh relate to the revelation and inspiration of Scripture?

Jesus is the focus and aim of all Scripture. His coming in the flesh as the Messiah was a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. Because He lived, died, and lives again, we have not only the Scriptures confirmed but, even better, the great promise of eternal life in a whole new existence.

Read again Deuteronomy 32:47. How have you experienced for yourself the truth about how obedience to God’s Word is “not a vain thing” for you? Why is faith in God and obedience to His Word never in vain?

Who Wrote the Bible, and Where?

The variety of authors, their locations, and their backgrounds provide a unique testimony that God works to communicate history and His message to people as culturally diverse as its intended audience.

What do the following texts tell us about the biblical writers and their backgrounds? (*Exod. 2:10, Amos 7:14, Jer. 1:1–6, Dan. 6:1–5, Matt. 9:9, Phil. 3:3–6, Rev. 1:9*).

The Bible was written by people from many different kinds of backgrounds and in various circumstances. Some were writing from palaces, others from prisons, some in exile, and still others during their missionary journeys to share the gospel. These men had different education and occupations. Some, like Moses, were destined to be kings or, like Daniel, to serve in high positions. Others were simple shepherds. Some were very young and others quite old. Despite these differences, they all had one thing in common: they were called by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write messages for His people, no matter when or where they lived.

Also, some of the writers were eyewitnesses to the events they recounted. Others made careful personal investigation of events or careful use of existing documents (*Josh. 10:13, Luke 1:1–3*). But all parts of the Bible are inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16*). This is the reason why Paul states that “whatever was written . . . was written for our instruction, so that through . . . the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NASB*). The God who created human language enables chosen people to communicate inspired thought in a trustworthy and reliable manner in human words.

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do His work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, none the less, from Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 26.

There were so many different writers, in so many different contexts, and yet the same God is revealed by them all. How does this amazing truth help confirm for us the veracity of God’s Word?

The Bible as Prophecy

The Bible is unique among other known religious works because up to 30 percent of its content comprises of prophecies and prophetic literature. The integration of prophecy and its fulfillment in time is central to the biblical worldview, for the God who acts in history also knows the future and has revealed it to His prophets (*Amos 3:7*). The Bible is not only the living Word, or the historical Word—it is the *prophetic* Word.

How do the following texts reveal the details of the coming Messiah?

Gen. 49:8–12 _____

Ps. 22:12–18 _____

Isa. 53:3–7 _____

Dan. 9:24–27 _____

Mic. 5:2 _____

Mal. 3:1 _____

Zech. 9:9 _____

There are at least 65 direct, Messianic predictions in the Old Testament, many more if we add typology, as well (typology is the study of how Old Testament rituals, such as the sacrifices, were mini-prophecies of Jesus). These prophecies relate to such specific details as “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah” (*Gen. 49:10*); that He would be born in Bethlehem in Judah (*Mic. 5:2*); that He would be “despised and rejected of men”; beaten, falsely accused, yet not open His mouth to defend Himself (*Isa. 53:3–7*); that His hands and feet would be pierced; and that they would divide His clothes among them (*Ps. 22:12–18*).

The fact that these prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled with such precision in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus testifies to their divine inspiration and revelation. It also indicates that Jesus was who He claimed and others claimed Him to be. Jesus followed the prophets of old in predicting His death and resurrection (*Luke 9:21, 22; Matt. 17:22, 23*), the fall of Jerusalem (*Matt. 24:1, 2*), and His second coming (*John 14:1–3*). Thus, the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection are predicted by the Bible, and their fulfillment ensures its reliability.

What are all the reasons you can think of for your belief in Jesus and His death for us? Share them in class on Sabbath and, in class, ask the question: Why is the evidence so compelling?

The Bible as History

The Bible is unique when compared to other “holy” books because it is constituted in history. This means that the Bible is not merely the philosophical thoughts of a human being (like Confucius or Buddha), but it records God’s acts in history as they progress toward a specific goal. In the case of the Bible, those goals are (1) the promise of a Messiah and (2) the second coming of Jesus. This progression is unique to the Judeo-Christian faith, in contrast to the cyclical view of many other world religions from ancient Egypt to modern Eastern religions.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, 51–55; Romans 8:11; and 1 Thessalonians 4:14. What do these passages teach us about not only the historical truth of Christ’s resurrection but also what it means for us personally?

The testimony of the four Gospels and Paul is that Jesus died, was buried, bodily rose from the dead, and appeared to various human beings. This is corroborated by eyewitnesses who laid Him in the tomb and later saw it empty. Witnesses touched Jesus, and He ate with them. Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of Jesus), and other women saw Him as the resurrected Christ. The disciples spoke with Him on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appeared to them for the Great Commission. Paul writes that if the witness of Scripture is rejected, then our preaching and faith are in “vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Other translations say “null and void” (REB) or “useless” (NIV). The disciples state, “ ‘It is true! The Lord has risen’ ” (Luke 24:34, NIV). The Greek term *ontos* refers to something that actually took place. It is translated, “really,” “surely,” or “indeed.” The disciples testify that “ ‘the Lord is risen indeed’ ” (NKJV).

Christ also is represented as the “firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:20) of all those who died. The historical fact that Christ bodily rose from the dead and lives today is the guarantee that they, too, will be raised as He was raised. All the righteous “will be made alive in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22, NRSV). The term here implies a future act of creation, when those “who belong to Christ,” or remain loyal to Him, will be raised “at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:23, NKJV) “at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV).

Why is the promise of the resurrection so central to our faith, especially since we understand that the dead are asleep? Without it, why is our faith indeed in “vain”?

The Transforming Power of the Word

Read 2 Kings 22:3–20. What causes King Josiah to tear his clothes? How does his discovery change not only him but also the entire nation of Judah?

In 621 B.C., when Josiah was about 25 years old, Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered “the book of the law,” which may have been the first five books of Moses or, specifically, the book of Deuteronomy. During the reign of his father Amon, and his most wicked grandfather Manasseh, this scroll had been lost in the midst of the worship of Baal, Asherah, and “all the host of heaven” (2 Kings 21:3–9). As Josiah hears the conditions of the covenant, he tears his clothes in utter distress, for he realizes how far he and his people have come from worshipping the true God. He immediately begins a reformation throughout the land, tearing down the high places and destroying images to foreign gods. When he is finished, there is only one place left to worship in Judah: the temple of God in Jerusalem. The discovery of the Word of God leads to conviction, repentance, and the power to change. This change begins with Josiah and eventually spreads to the rest of Judah.

How does the Bible assure us that it has the power to change our lives and show us the way to salvation? Read John 16:13, John 17:17, Hebrews 4:12, and Romans 12:2.

One of the most powerful testimonies of the power of the Bible is the changed life of a person. It is the Word that cuts through human sin and depravity and reveals our true human nature and our need for a Savior.

Such a unique book as the Bible, constituted in history, imbued with prophecy, and with the power to transform the life, also must be interpreted in a unique way. It cannot be interpreted like any other book, for the *living* Word of God must be understood in the light of a *living* Christ who promised to send His Spirit to lead us “into all truth” (John 16:13). The Bible, then, as a revelation of God’s truth, must contain its own internal principles of interpretation. These principles can be found in studying how the writers of Scripture used Scripture and were guided by it as they allowed Scripture to interpret itself.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602, in *The Great Controversy*; “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” pp. 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Many have died for upholding and remaining faithful to the Word of God. One such man was Dr. Rowland Taylor, an English Parish minister, who resisted the imposition of the Catholic mass during the reign of Bloody Mary in his Hadley, England parish. After being cast out of the church and derided for his adherence to Scripture, he appealed in person to the bishop of Winchester, the Lord Chancellor of England, but he had him cast into prison and eventually sent him to the stake. Just before his death in 1555, he spoke these words:

“ ‘Good people! I have taught you nothing but God’s holy Word, and those lessons that I have taken out of God’s blessed book, the holy Bible. I have come here this day to seal it with my blood.’ ”—John Foxe, *The New Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick (North Brunswick, N.J.: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1997), p. 193. Dr. Taylor was heard repeating Psalm 51 just before the fire was lit, and he gave up his life.

The question we need to ask ourselves now is: Would we remain as faithful to upholding the truths in God’s Word? Sooner or later, in the final conflict, that test will come. The time to prepare for it, of course, is now.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what way does prophecy confirm the Bible’s divine origin? How can these fulfilled prophecies affirm us in our faith?
- ❷ In reference to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, why is the evidence for Jesus as the Messiah so powerful?
- ❸ Jesus and the apostles demonstrated unwavering faith in the trustworthiness and divine authority of Holy Scripture. For example, how many times did Jesus Himself refer to the Scriptures and the fact that (often in reference to Himself) the Scriptures must be “fulfilled”? (See, for instance, Matt. 26:54, 56; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; John 17:12.) Thus, if Jesus Himself took Scripture (in His case, the Old Testament) so seriously, especially in terms of prophecy being fulfilled, what then should our attitude be, as well, toward the Bible?

A Grain of Prayer

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Yolanda Malla learned about the power of prayer from a rice field.

Malla found work, planting and cultivating rice, in a field in her native Philippines after her husband divorced her, leaving her with two baby boys. The landowner gave her permission to work in his rice field under the condition that she give half of the harvest to him. The field was located beside a field owned by a relative.

Malla worked hard and, when the crop started to grow, she saw that the harvest was likely to be first-class rice.

“Lord, I don’t want any disaster to destroy this rice,” she prayed. “I need it to feed my children.”

Two weeks later, a powerful storm struck the region. Malla listened as the wind and rain pounded against her home.

Suddenly she remembered the rice.

“I can’t do anything, Lord,” she said. “Please remember my prayer.”

Several days later, after the flooding subsided, she managed to leave her home and travel to the rice field to survey the damage.

To her surprise, her rice was brown and ripe. There was no sign that the fierce storm had ever happened.

Then Malla looked over at the surrounding fields. They were completely ruined. Even her relative’s crop was destroyed.

The field’s owner was amazed at harvesttime.

“This is the first time that this rice field has produced first-class rice,” he said, surprise ringing in his voice. “Rats ate the crop of the farmer who borrowed this field to grow rice last year.”

The rodents had eaten so much of the rice that the previous farmer was able to harvest the entire crop on his own. Malla, however, needed 17 people to help her harvest the rice.

Looking at the bountiful crop, Malla remembered her prayer on the night of the storm.

“A small prayer is a powerful prayer,” she said in an interview in Cyprus, where she works as a domestic helper. “A small grain of prayer produced a million grains of rice. We couldn’t even count the rice.”



Read next week about how MALLA, pictured, became a Seventh-day Adventist in Cyprus and led two friends to Jesus. Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Key Texts: *Deut. 32:45–47; Gen. 49:8–12; Isa. 53:3–7; 1 Cor. 15:3–5, 51–55; Rom. 12:2.*

Part I: Overview

In a world of media overload, we are increasingly being bombarded by ideas that compete for our attention and promise the newest trends to guide our lives. It has become more difficult in this environment of overstimulation to find quiet time with the Word of God. Some may even begin to wonder whether the Bible is still relevant in today's fast-paced world. We need to be reminded of the injunction to "be still, and know that I am God" (*Ps. 46:10*) as a way to help us recognize that the Bible is still God's greatest gift to communicate His plan of Redemption. There is no other book like it anywhere in the world.

A number of important elements make the Bible unique when compared to other religious books. Four elements, in particular, stand out in stark contrast to the philosophical and esoteric thoughts of the likes of Confucius, the Quran, and the Hindu sacred writings: (1) the Bible comprises up to 30 percent prophecy and prophetic literature; (2) the Bible is constituted in history, that is, it speaks of a God who acts in history; (3) the Bible events are placed in a spatial dimension of real geographical places, and (4) the Bible has the power to transform lives because of the God who speaks to us through His living Word. Is it any wonder, then, that for centuries it has inspired the greatest works of music, art, and literature? This week we will study why the Bible is unique and unrivaled and remains so, even with the fast growth of technology and knowledge in the twenty-first century.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

The great pyramids of Egypt tower over the modern city of Cairo. Excavations have revealed that they were built during the Old Kingdom by a sophisticated technology and knowledge of building that assumed mathematics and astronomy that was not thought to have existed before the Greeks. Until the Eiffel Tower was completed in Paris in 1889, the Great Pyramid was the tallest building ever built. Today, archaeologists still grapple with the logistics and enormity of this accomplishment. Moses arrived in ancient Egypt hundreds of years after the Great Pyramid was

erected and was educated to be the future king of this greatest of empires. Yet, “by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (*Heb. 11:24, NKJV*).

Scripture

The last words of Moses to the people he led to the Promised Land were these: “ ‘Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law’ ” (*Deut. 32:46, NKJV*). *Setting to heart* is an expression used in the Bible to describe the internalization and *depositing* of God’s Word within the heart. Moses emphasizes this idea when he instructs that children especially should be commanded to follow the instructions or law of God. This law is more important than anything, for “it is your life” (*Deut. 32:47*).

Discuss with your class how they deal with the distractions all around them and maintain a living relationship with Christ through His Word. Ask the class to assess how much time they spend on certain activities every day (answering emails, texting, social media, television, work, family, devotions). Observe that those activities that we spend most of our time on are often those that are most important in our lives. What intentional steps are your class members taking to pass on their Christian experience to their children? Why is this living legacy so important in the time in which we live?

Scripture

The Bible is filled with places wherein God revealed Himself. Among some of the more memorable spots are Mount Moriah when Abraham was about to slay Isaac (*Gen. 22:2*), the burning bush on Mount Horeb in Sinai (*Exod. 3:1–4*), the Red Sea through which Israel escaped on dry land (*Exod. 14:1–30*), and Capernaum where so many of the healing miracles of Jesus occurred. This pattern of incorporating a spatial dimension into the events described actually sets the Bible apart from most other holy writings (the entire Quran, for example, contains fewer geographical designations than those found in Genesis 1–20 alone). The Bible contains references to hundreds of cities and lands, including references to specific mountains, bodies of water, deserts and wildernesses, regions, and states. There are times when the geography is a crucial element that gives added meaning and dimension to an event.

Bethlehem is one example of how the Bible’s geography is important to our understanding of biblical history. In Hebrew, Bethlehem means “the house of bread.” It was in Bethlehem that Ruth and Boaz met and were married. There, they had a son named Obed, who had a son

named Jesse. Jesse became the father of David, who would later establish a dynasty of kings that would rule in Jerusalem for hundreds of years until the destruction of the temple (*Ruth 4:13–17; Matt. 1:5, 6*). When Samuel came to anoint a new king, he came to Bethlehem where God directed him to anoint David. Then, 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Micah 5:2 predicts that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, which is in Judea. So, it should not surprise us that God sends Jesus, “the bread of life” (*John 6:33–51*) to be born in Bethlehem, the house of bread. Born of the Holy Spirit to Mary, Jesus brings the fullness of the gospel to the world over which He will one day reign as King of kings forever.

Ask the class what other significant insights can be gained from understanding the geography and place names of surrounding historical events in the Bible. For example, what was the relationship between Abraham’s encounter with God on Mount Moriah and Christ’s death in the same vicinity nearly two thousand years later?

Illustration

Jose grew up in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan. At the age of 11, he already was getting involved in a local gang. He walked the walk and talked the talk. His parents were worried about where he was heading. One day they received an advertisement for a vegetarian cooking school. Jose’s father was a cook in a local restaurant and began to attend with his wife. In one of the meetings, a Vacation Bible School was announced, and Jose and his sisters began to attend. Jose had never heard much about the Bible. He was very intrigued by the story of Joshua and his conquest of Canaan under God’s leadership. He learned that God was a powerful God and could overcome the enemies of His people. Jose wanted to know more and began to read the Bible. Soon he was enrolled in the local Pathfinder club. His parents noticed major changes. Jose’s language changed. His clothing changed. Even the way he walked changed. Six months later, Jose requested baptism. His family was amazed at the change in Jose’s life. They wanted what Jose was experiencing. After studying the Bible together with the pastor, the whole family was baptized on a Sabbath morning. The power of God’s Word had transformed their lives.

Scripture

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. The Bible says that his grandfather Manasseh served the Canaanite gods, engaging in spiritualism and its associated sexual perversions, along with

astrology. Manasseh even sacrificed his own son. He led his people into terrible apostasy, for he “seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:9). From Josiah’s genes and upbringing, we might expect that Judah would be doomed to the same fate as when under King Manasseh, but instead, the Bible says that Josiah “did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2). What made the difference?—the discovery and reading of God’s Word, Josiah’s deep repentance, and his actions to restore all of Israel to the right worship of God. Excavations in Judah covering this time period have revealed a temple at Arad with two altars and standing stones in the Most Holy Place that represented more than one deity. This temple was destroyed at the end of the seventh century, which many scholars have attributed to the work of Josiah. Because of this great reformation, God spared Judah and Jerusalem for a time and withheld His judgment until some 35 years later. God promised, “Thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place” (2 Kings 22:20). After reading 2 Kings 21:2–9, ask the class how this description of Judah compares with the challenges of evil in this world today. How can Scripture transform our lives so that we, too, can overcome?

Part III: Life Application

The Bible is God’s inspired Word for all time. It is not limited to either the time or cultures in which it was written. Thus, it still has power to transform lives today. As you prepare for this lesson in your specific culture, reflect on the impact of the Bible in your part of the world today. Ask the class to share an experience in which they have been transformed by God’s Word and have recognized its life-changing power in their lives. Here are some other questions that elaborate more specifically on these themes.

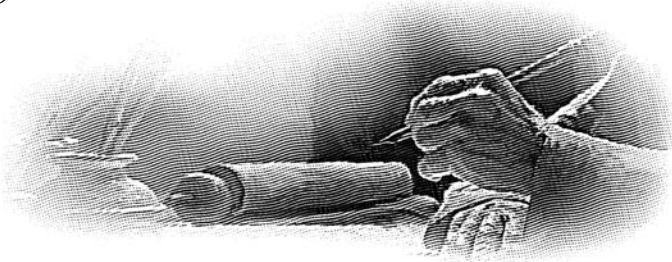
- 1. How do the prophecies of Scripture provide us with hope for the future, even in the context of last-day events? In what ways do these prophecies give us assurances of the promises of God and His ability to see His plan through to the end?**

-
2. Share an experience from your life or a friend's that testifies to the power of God's Word to change the life of a person. In what ways did these changes take place, and how did others see the Holy Spirit's power in action?

3. In what ways can you be the continuing witness of God's power to transform your family, your neighborhood, or your town or city today? How can you share the Word of God in an effective way to cause change and prepare others to meet Jesus when He comes? Remember that we are His hands and feet, and what we communicate in actions and words will reflect on how others perceive God.

Notes

The Origin *and* Nature *of the* Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Deut. 18:18; Exod. 17:14; John 1:14; Heb. 11:3, 6.

Memory Text: “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NKJV).

The way we see and understand the origin and nature of Scripture greatly impacts the role that the Bible plays in our lives and in the church at large. How we interpret the Bible is significantly shaped and influenced by our understanding of the process of revelation and inspiration. When we want to understand Scripture correctly, we first of all need to allow the Bible to determine the basic parameters of how it should be treated. We cannot study mathematics with the empirical methods employed in biology or sociology. We cannot study physics with the same tools used to study history. In a similar manner, the spiritual truths of the Bible will not be known and understood correctly by atheistic methods that approach the Bible as if God did not exist. Instead, our interpretation of Scripture needs to take seriously the divine-human dimension of God's Word. Hence what is needed for a proper interpretation of Scripture is that we approach the Bible in faith rather than with methodological skepticism or doubt.

This week we will look at some foundational aspects of the origin and nature of the Bible that should impact our interpretation and understanding of it.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 11.

The Divine Revelation of the Bible

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. How does Peter express his conviction about the origin of the biblical prophetic message?

The Bible is not like any other book. According to the apostle Peter, the prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit in such a way that the content of their message came from God. They did not invent it themselves. Rather than being “cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16), the prophetic message of the Bible is of divine origin, and thus it is truthful and trustworthy. “Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, NKJV). God was at work in the process of revelation, where He made known His will to selected human beings.

Direct verbal communication between God and particular human beings is an inescapable fact of the Scriptures. This is why the Bible has special, divine authority, and we need to take the divine element into consideration in our interpretation of the Scriptures. Having our holy God as their ultimate author, the biblical books are aptly called “holy Scriptures” (Rom. 1:2, 2 Tim. 3:15).

They were given for practical purposes, too. They are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, TNIV).

We also need the help of the Holy Spirit to apply to our lives what God has revealed in His Word. According to the apostle Peter, the interpretation of the divinely revealed Word of God is not a matter of our own opinions. We need God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to rightly understand its meaning.

Scripture also says, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7, NKJV). The biblical words for “revelation” (in its various forms) express the idea that something previously hidden has now been disclosed or unveiled and thus becomes known and made manifest. As human beings, we need such an uncovering, or revelation, for we are sinful beings, separated from God because of our sin, and therefore dependent upon Him to know His will.

It’s hard enough obeying the Bible even when we believe in its divine origin. What would happen if we came to distrust or even to question that divine origin?

The Process of Inspiration

Because God uses the medium of language to reveal His will to humankind, divine revelation is capable of being written down. Yet, as we already have seen, the Bible is the result of God’s revealing truth to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, who transmits and safeguards His message through human instruments. This is the reason why we can expect the fundamental unity that is seen in all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation (*for example, compare Gen. 3:14, 15 to Rev. 12:17*).

Read 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; and Deuteronomy 18:18. What do these texts say about the inspiration of Scripture?

All of Scripture is divinely inspired, even if not all parts are equally inspiring to read or even necessarily applicable to us today (for example, the sections about the Hebrew feasts were inspired even though we’re not required to keep them today). Yet, we need to learn from all of Scripture, even from those parts that are not so easy to read and understand or that are not specifically applicable to us now.

Also, not everything in the Bible was directly or supernaturally revealed. Sometimes God used biblical writers who carefully investigated things or used other existing documents (*see Josh. 10:13, Luke 1:1–3*) to communicate His message.

Even then, all Scripture is inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16*). This is the reason why Paul states that “whatever” was written, was written for our instruction, so that through “the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NASB*).

“The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all ‘given by inspiration of God’ (*2 Tim. 3:16*); yet they are expressed in the words of men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 7.

Today there are biblical scholars who deny divine authorship of many parts of the Bible, even to the point where many crucial teachings—Creation, the Exodus, the Resurrection—are denied. Why is it so essential that we not open that door—even a bit? After all, are we to pass judgment upon the Word of God?

The Written Word of God

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’ ” (Exod. 34:27, NKJV). Why would the Lord have Moses write down these words as opposed to having Moses recite them to the people only? What is the obvious advantage of the Written Word?

The God who speaks and who created human language enables chosen people to communicate the divinely revealed truths and divinely inspired thoughts in a trustworthy and reliable manner. Hence, it is no surprise to find that God commanded biblical writers early on to commit His instruction and revelation in writing.

What do the following texts teach about written revelation?

Exod. 17:14, Exod. 24:4 _____

Josh. 24:26 _____

Jer. 30:2 _____

Rev. 1:11, 19; Rev. 21:5; Rev. 22:18, 19 _____

Why did God command that His revelation and inspired messages be written down? The obvious answer is so that we will not forget them so easily. The written words of the Bible are a constant reference point that directs us to God and His will. A written document usually can be preserved better and be much more reliable than oral messages, which must be told again and again. The Written Word, which can be copied again and again, also can be made accessible to many more people than if it were spoken only. Last, we can speak to a limited number of people at one time in one place, but what is committed to writing can be read by countless readers in many different locations and continents, and even be a blessing numerous generations later. In fact, if people can’t themselves read, others can read a written document aloud to them.

The Parallel Between Christ and Scripture

Read John 1:14; John 2:22; John 8:31, 32; and John 17:17. What parallels do you see between Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, and Scripture, the Written Word of God?

There is a parallel between the Word of God, who became flesh (i.e., Jesus Christ), and the Written Word of God (i.e., Scripture). Just as Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit yet born of a woman, Holy Scripture also is of supernatural origin yet delivered through human beings.

Jesus Christ became a man in time and space. He lived during a specific time and at a specific place. Yet, this fact did not nullify His divinity, nor did it make Jesus historically relative. He is the only Redeemer for all people, all over the world, throughout all time (*see Acts 4:12*). Likewise, God's Written Word, the Bible, also was given at a specific time and in a particular culture. Just like Jesus Christ, the Bible is not time-conditioned (i.e., limited to a specific time and location); instead, it remains binding for all people, all over the world.

When God revealed Himself, He came down to the human level. Jesus' human nature showed all the signs of human infirmities and the effects of some 4,000 years of degeneration. Yet, He was without sin. Similarly, the language of Scripture is human language, not some "perfect super-human" language that no one speaks or is able to understand. While any language has its limitations, the Creator of humankind, who is the Creator of human language, is perfectly capable of communicating His will to human beings in a trustworthy manner without misleading us.

Of course, every comparison has its limits. Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture are not identical. The Bible is not an incarnation of God. God is no book. God in Jesus Christ became human. We love the Bible because we worship the Savior proclaimed in its pages.

The Bible is a unique and inseparable divine-human union. Ellen G. White saw this clearly when she wrote: "The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' John 1:14."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 8.

Why *must* Scripture be foundational to our faith? Without it, where would we be?

Understanding the Bible in Faith

Read Hebrews 11:3, 6. Why is faith so essential in understanding God and His Word? Why is it impossible to please God without faith?

All true learning takes place in the context of faith. It is the implicit faith of the child toward his or her parents that enables the child to learn new things. It is a trusting relationship that guides the child to learn the basic and fundamental aspects of life and love. Knowledge and understanding, therefore, grow out of a loving and trusting relationship.

In the same vein, a good musician plays a piece of music well when he or she not only masters the technical skills that help one to play an instrument but also when he or she exhibits a love for the music, the composer, and the instrument. In a similar way, we do not understand the Bible correctly when we approach it with an attitude of skepticism or methodological doubt, but in a spirit of love and faith. The apostle Paul wrote, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (*Heb. 11:6, NIV*). Thus, it is indispensable to approach the Bible in faith, acknowledging its supernatural origin, rather than seeing the Bible just as a human book.

Seventh-day Adventists clearly have expressed this insight into the supernatural origin of Scripture in the first fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which states: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)”

What are people missing in their understanding of the Bible when they do not approach Scripture from an attitude of faith? Why is this faith not blind? That is, what are the good reasons that we have for this faith and why is faith still a necessity when dealing with the truths of the Bible?

Further Thought: Read the following pages from the document “Methods of Bible Study”: “2. Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture,” part a “Origin” and part b “Authority.” (“Methods of Bible Study” can be found at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.)

As essential as the Bible is to our faith, it alone would be of no real spiritual value to us were it not for the influence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds as we read and study it.

“In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. . . . Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why does God reveal Himself and His will to us? Why do we need revelation?
- ❷ How does God reveal Himself? God uses different means to reveal something about Himself. He does so in a more general way through nature—but more specifically through dreams (*Dan. 7:1*); visions (*Gen. 15:1*); signs (*1 Kings 18:24, 38*); and through His Son, Jesus Christ (*Heb. 1:1, 2*). Has God revealed Himself to you personally? Share your experience.
- ❸ Some Bible scholars reject many of the teachings of the Bible, seeing them as mere myths. Teachings such as the Creation story, a literal Adam and Eve, the Exodus, and the stories of Daniel are just a few examples (from the Old Testament) of teachings that are dismissed as nothing but made-up stories designed to teach spiritual truths. This is what happens when humans pass judgment upon God’s Word. What should this tell us about how dangerous such an attitude clearly is?
- ❹ God has revealed His will in a powerful way in the Bible. Yet, God desires your help in spreading His will and the good news of His salvation in Jesus Christ alone. When people observe you, what kind of God do they see in you and through your behavior?

Three Filipino Baptisms in Cyprus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Yolanda Malla, a Filipino domestic worker in Cyprus, saw that her friend Beatrise had tagged her in a Seventh-day Adventist sermon on Facebook.

Malla had met Beatrise, a Filipino domestic worker in Israel, several years earlier when they both worked as domestic helpers in Taiwan. Malla remembered that Beatrise had been baptized recently in Israel.

“Why did you become a Seventh-day Adventist?” she wrote on Facebook.

“This is where I feel comfortable,” Beatrise replied. “Just watch the video that I sent you, and you’ll understand.”

Malla clicked on the video and heard a sermon about God setting aside the seventh-day Sabbath at Creation, reminding His people to keep the Sabbath with the Ten Commandments, and calling for Sabbath observance throughout the New Testament. Malla was surprised and checked the sermon’s texts in the Bible. She saw that the Sabbath was on Saturday.

Why have I gone to so many churches and never heard a pastor preach about the Sabbath? she wondered. *Why does no one else talk about the Sabbath?*

She called Beatrise. “This has opened my mind!” she said. “I want to find this church that keeps the Sabbath, but where can I find it in Cyprus?”

Beatrise did some research and sent the telephone number of Branislav Mirilov, president of the Adventist Church in Cyprus. Malla called and received directions to the church in her town, Limassol.

Malla began attending the church’s Bible study group on Sundays. Soon she invited a cousin, Michelin, also a domestic worker in Cyprus, to accompany her. Then she invited another Filipino domestic worker, Maria, to attend as well. But Maria cared for an elderly woman who needed round-the-clock care, and she couldn’t get permission to leave the house.

“No problem,” said Marica Mirilov, who is married to the church president and works as a Bible worker. “We can do the Bible studies on Facebook Messenger.”

In a short time, Malla, Michelin, and Maria were baptized.



Leading friends to baptism is the natural result of knowing Jesus, said YOLANDA MALLA, 42, a single mother, still working in Cyprus to support seven- and eight-year-old sons in the Philippines. *“Even though I come from a broken home, I have strength because I have learned that I have hope,” she said.*

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Key Texts: *2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Rom. 15:4; Acts 1:16.*

Part I: Overview

Our understanding of the origin and nature of Scripture significantly influences the way we read and treat the Bible. If the Bible were a human book, written just like any other book put together by fallible human beings, we could not trust it. Under such circumstances, it certainly would not carry divine authority. To be fair to the Bible, we need to allow the writers of the Bible themselves to define and explain what they think about their writings and thus allow the Bible to determine the basic parameters of how it should be treated. The writers of the Bible claim that their message is not humanly invented. Instead, the Bible is divinely revealed and its content inspired by God.

Our understanding of the process of revelation and inspiration is crucial for our approach to God's Word. Because God uses the medium of language to communicate with human beings, divine revelation is capable of being written down. The Holy Spirit enables the writers of the Bible to faithfully and reliably commit to writing what He has revealed to them. This divine inspiration gives the Bible its divine authority and guarantees the unity that we find from Genesis to the book of Revelation. Although penned by human beings, the Bible is, nevertheless, the Written Word of God. In this divine-human dimension, there is a certain parallel between Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who became flesh, and the Written Word of God, the Bible. We grasp and appreciate this reality only by faith.

Part II: Commentary

Imagine a purely human book that is written by many different authors over a period of hundreds of years. Imagine that these diverse authors would reminisce in their writings about God and their religious experience. Their differing perspectives would grant their writings little authority beyond their personal opinions. They would carry only some human authority, if any. But the Bible is not like that. It claims that the ultimate author is God. God communicates through His Holy Spirit with the writers of the Bible, delivering the content that *He* deems important for us to know. The biblical God is a God who speaks. He created human beings with the ability to speak and to understand verbal information. Thus, He

uses language to communicate with humankind. These divine messages are not given in an artificial heavenly language that only angels understand. They are given in the very language of the writers of the Bible. They also are given for practical purposes, so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (*2 Tim. 3:17, NKJV*). Hence, the collective biblical books are aptly called the “holy scriptures” (*Rom. 1:2, 2 Tim. 3:15*).

Thus, the authority of Scripture is a shorthand for God’s authority, speaking in and through Scripture. In order for the Bible to play its divinely intended role in one’s personal life, as well as in the life of the church, we must take its claim of divine origins seriously. It also means we must listen to all of Scripture, as it is written.

If we exclude some parts of Scripture as allegedly uninspired and thus merely human, we have no more than a selective authority of the Bible. Rather than standing above Scripture and judging Scripture, we should take our stand under Scripture, thus allowing Scripture to judge us.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 we learn something important about the attitude with which the believers in Thessalonica received the Word of God. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and reflect on how the believers in Thessalonica received God’s Word. What does their reception of Scripture tell us about how we should receive the biblical message when we read or hear it?

Scripture

We see God’s highest and most explicit revelation in the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ. Apart from that, the most efficient and widely used form of divine revelation is divine speaking. In the Bible we find repeated references to the God who speaks. His Word is given to His spokespersons the prophets. The numerous occurrences of phrases such as the “word of the LORD” or “thus says the LORD” or the “word that the LORD spoke” testify to this fact. This divine speaking produces the Word of the Lord and eventually leads to its embodiment in a written document. The writing down of God’s Word also is the result of God’s initiative (*see Exod. 17:14, Exod. 24:4, Josh. 24:26, etc.*).

What is the purpose for God’s written revelation? It is a constant reference point for His people. It enables God’s people continually to hear it in an unaltered way and to be careful to do what it says (*see Deut. 30:9, 10*). A written document can be preserved better and more reliably than an oral message. There is greater permanency with a written text than with an orally spoken word. A written document can be copied and multiplied and thus made available to many more people in many different

locations than any oral message could ever be. It also is available across time and can be a blessing to readers and listeners many generations later. As a permanent written record, it remains a norm for the veracity of the biblical message throughout the ages.

While it is true that God inspires thoughts in the writers of the Bible, we would not know anything about these thoughts if they had not been communicated through words (i.e., in human language). Only words give us access to thoughts. Hence the process of inspiration encompasses thoughts as well as the end product of those thoughts: the written words of Scripture. “Whether inspiration should be attributed to the inspired writers or to the Scriptures written by them is to a large extent a needless dilemma. It is clear that the primary locus of inspiration is in people. The Holy Spirit moved upon people to speak or write; yet what they spoke or wrote was the inspired word of God.”—Peter M. van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration” in Raul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 39. Thus, the apostle Paul could write: “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*” (2 Tim. 3:16, NASB, *emphasis added*).

Illustration

There is an interesting parallel between the Word of God who became flesh (Jesus Christ) and the Written Word of God (the Bible). Just as Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, yet born into this world by a woman, so the Bible has the Holy Spirit as its ultimate author, yet was written by human writers.

Jesus Christ became flesh at a specific time and a specific place (i.e., He was born in Bethlehem, not in New York, Tokyo, or Nairobi; He was baptized in the river Jordan, not in the Mississippi, the Nile, or the Ganges). Yet, this particularity did not nullify His divinity, nor did it make Him relative only to a particular time historically. He is the only Redeemer for *all* people, *all* around the globe, throughout *all* time. In a similar manner, the biblical books were given at a specific time and in a particular culture. But as with Jesus, this transmission does not make the Bible purely time-conditioned or relative. The Bible is God’s Word for *all* people, *all* over the world, until the end of time.

Jesus became human and lived as a real human being with all the signs of human infirmities. Yet, He was without sin. In a similar manner, the language of the Bible is human language with all its limitations, not a perfect heavenly language. Yet, what the Bible affirms is trustworthy, not misleading!

When Jesus lived on this earth, He wanted to be accepted for who He truly was: the Divine Son of God. In a similar manner, God does not want the Bible to be read as just another book. He wants it to be accepted for what it truly is: the Written Word of God. As such, the Bible carries an innate authority that goes beyond any human wisdom. This qualifies the Bible to be God's only norm for all doctrine and religious experience.

Of course, Jesus Christ and the Bible are not identical. There are significant differences. The Bible is not an incarnation of God. God did not become a book. We do not worship a book. We worship the Savior who is proclaimed in the Bible. But without the Bible, we would not know much about Jesus at all. The Bible without Jesus would be missing the most important message. But without the Bible we would not know that Jesus is the promised Messiah. We could not accept Him as the assured Savior. We would be lost. Therefore, the Bible is foundational and indispensable to our faith.

Scripture

Not only is Scripture foundational to our faith but it also needs to be approached in faith, if we want to do justice to its divine nature. In Hebrews 11:6 we read that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (*NIV*). The life-changing message of the Bible is not discerned properly at a critical distance but must be accepted in faith and obeyed with love.

Part III: Life Application

To know that the Bible carries divine authority motivates us to treat it with respect and love. Whatever we love, we will not speak flippantly about. The way we talk about the Bible should reveal our deep appreciation for the Word of God. This appreciation will become evident, not just in the way we carry and hold the Bible—but more important, in how we follow and implement its teachings in our lives. Our attitude will be one of gratitude and faithfulness. To be faithful to the Written Word of God is not the veneration of a book. It is rather an expression of our love for the triune God about whom this book speaks. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*). The Bible acquaints us with the living God and helps us to become more like Jesus.

What would an attitude of gratitude for Scripture and faithfulness to it look like? How does the authority of Scripture differ from that of other literature? Where are you tempted not to follow the Bible because of personal experiences and feelings that draw you in a different direction?

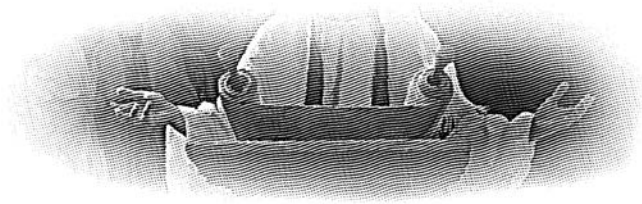
How can you gain an attitude of trust?

To be faithful to Scripture is not the same as being faithful to my own favorite ideas about the Bible. In the latter case, I would be faithful only to myself. Rather, faithfulness to Scripture calls for an openness to allow the Bible to shape and transform my thoughts and actions.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Jesus and the Apostles’ View of the Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 4:1–11; Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45; Luke 4:25–27; Acts 4:24–26.*

Memory Text: “But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matthew 4:4, NKJV*).

Unfortunately in this postmodern age, the Bible has been largely reinterpreted through the lens of a philosophy that questions both its inspiration and its authority. In fact, the Bible is seen as merely the ideas of human beings living in a relatively primitive culture who couldn’t possibly understand the world as we do today. At the same time, the supernatural element has been either downplayed or even removed from the picture, turning the Bible into a document that, instead of being God’s view of humanity, has become humanity’s view of God. And the result is that, for many, the Bible has become largely irrelevant in an age of Darwinian thinking and modern philosophy.

However, we completely reject that position. Instead, in the New Testament, we can see the inspired way to view the entire Scripture by studying how Jesus and the apostles understood the Old Testament, the only Bible that they had at that time. How did they relate to the people, places, and events described? What were their assumptions and subsequent methods of interpretation? Let’s follow them and their understanding, in contrast to the misconceptions of uninspired humans whose assumptions lead only to skepticism and doubt about the Word of God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

It Is Written

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist marked the beginning of the Savior's ministry, following which Jesus was led by the Spirit into the Judean wilderness, where—in His weakest human condition—He was tempted by Satan.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. How does Jesus defend Himself against Satan's temptations in the wilderness? What should we learn about the Bible from this account?

When tempted by appetite, Jesus responds: “ ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, NKJV*). Jesus points back to the living Word and its ultimate, divine source. In this way, He affirms the authority of Scripture. When tempted with the world's kingdoms and glory, Jesus responds, “ ‘It is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:10, Luke 4:8, NKJV*). Christ reminds us that true worship is focused on God and not on anyone else, and that submission to His Word is true worship. Finally, with the temptation on the love of display and on presumption, Jesus responds, “ ‘It is written again, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:7, NKJV; also Luke 4:12*).

In all three temptations, Jesus responds with the words “It is written.” That is, Jesus goes right to the Word of God and nothing else to deal with the attacks and deceptions of Satan. This should be a powerful lesson to all of us: the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the ultimate standard and foundation of our belief.

Yes, the Bible and the Bible alone was Jesus' method of defense against the attacks of the adversary. Jesus is God, but in His defense against Satan He submits Himself solely to the Word of God.

It is not opinion; it is not an elaborate, convoluted argument; it is not with words of personal animosity; it is instead by the simple yet profound words of Scripture. For Christ, Scripture has the greatest authority and the greatest power. In this way, His ministry begins with a certain foundation and continues to build upon the trustworthiness of the Bible.

How can we learn to be just as reliant on the Word of God, and as submissive to it?

Jesus and the Law

Read Matthew 5:17–20; Matthew 22:29; and Matthew 23:2, 3. What is Jesus saying in these contexts?

Jesus taught His disciples obedience to the Word of God and the law. There is never a hint of Him doubting the authority or relevance of Scripture. On the contrary, He constantly referred to it as the source of divine authority. And to the Sadducees He said, “ ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God’ ” (*Matt. 22:29, RSV*). Jesus taught that a mere intellectual knowledge of the Bible and its teachings was insufficient for knowing truth and, more important, for knowing the Lord, who is that truth.

What does Matthew 22:37–40 tell us about Jesus’ view of the law of Moses?

In this statement to the lawyer, Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments, given to Moses nearly 1,500 years earlier. It should be recognized how Jesus focuses on the Old Testament law and elevates it to the highest level. Many Christians incorrectly have concluded that here a new commandment is given, and thus somehow the Old Testament law is now replaced by the New Testament gospel. But the fact is that what Jesus is teaching is based on the Old Testament law. Christ had unveiled and revealed the law more fully so that “ ‘on these two commandments’ ” (summarizing the Ten Commandments, the first four of which focus on the human-divine relationship, and the second six of which focus on human interpersonal relationships) “ ‘depend all the law and the prophets’ ” (*Matt. 22:40, RSV*). In this way, Jesus also uplifts the entire Old Testament when He says, “the law and the prophets,” for this is a shortened way of referring to the law, prophets, and writings, or all three divisions of the Old Testament.

“He [Christ] pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 39, 40.

What (if any) competitive sources of authority (family, philosophy, culture) might be pitted against your submission to the Word of God?

Jesus and All Scripture

Read Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45. How does Jesus use the Scriptures to teach the disciples the gospel message?

After the death of Christ, His followers were confused and in doubt. How could this have happened? What did it mean? In this chapter of Luke, we see that Jesus appears to them twice, first to two who are on the road to Emmaus, and then to others later. On two separate occasions, Jesus explains how all has been fulfilled from the Old Testament prophecies: “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (*Luke 24:27, RSV*).

Again in Luke 24:44, 45, He says, “ ‘These are my words . . . that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’ ” (*RSV*). Jesus then “opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (*RSV*).

Note the specific reference in Luke 24:27 to “all the scriptures.” This is reemphasized in the second passage as the “ ‘law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms’ ” (*Luke 24:44, RSV*). This establishes clearly that Jesus, the Word made flesh (*John 1:1–3, 14*), relies on the authority of Scripture to explain how these things were foretold hundreds of years earlier. By referring to the totality of Scripture, Jesus is teaching the disciples by example. As they go forth to spread the gospel message, they, too, were to expound all Scripture to bring understanding and power to the new converts throughout the world.

Notice, too, how in Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus says to His disciples then (and to us today) that “ ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ ” (*RSV*). But that authority remains rooted in His Father and the entire Godhead, for He says to them, “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ ” (*RSV*). Then comes the key passage: “ ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ ” (*RSV*). What does Jesus teach and command? His teachings are based on all of Scripture. It is upon the prophetic authority of the Word that He came, and it is in fulfillment of the prophecies in Scripture that He submitted to His Father.

If Jesus accepts all of Scripture, why must we do the same? Again, how can we learn to accept the authority of all Scripture, even when we realize that not everything is still necessarily applicable to us today? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Jesus and the Origin and History of the Bible

Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God in the sense that what it says is synonymous with what God says. Its origin is found in God and, therefore, contains ultimate authority for every aspect of life. God worked through history to reveal His will to humanity through the Bible.

For instance, in Matthew 19:4, 5 (*NKJV*), *Jesus* refers to a quote written by Moses. But Jesus takes this passage and says, “ ‘He who made them at the beginning . . . said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother.” ’ ” Instead of saying “Scripture says,” Jesus says, “ ‘He who made them at the beginning . . . said,’ ” attributing to the Creator’s Word what the narrator of Genesis wrote. God is, in fact, regarded here as the author of this statement, even though it was written by Moses.

Read the following passages. How did Jesus understand the historical persons and events of the Bible?

Matt. 12:3, 4 _____

Mark 10:6–8 _____

Luke 4:25–27 _____

Luke 11:51 _____

Matt. 24:38 _____

Jesus consistently treats Old Testament people, places, and events as historical truth. He refers to Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, Abel in Genesis 4, David eating the showbread, and Elisha among other historical figures. He repeatedly speaks of the sufferings of the prophets of old (*Matt. 5:12, Matt. 13:57, Matt. 23:34–36, Mark 6:4*). In a message of warning, Jesus also describes the days of Noah: “ ‘They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be’ ” (*Matt. 24:38, 39, NKJV*). There is every indication that Jesus was referring to this mighty act of God’s judgment as a historical event.

Because Jesus Himself refers to these historical people as real, what does it say about the power of Satan’s deceptions that many people today, even professed Christians, often deny their existence? Why must we never fall into that trap?

The Apostles and the Bible

The New Testament writers approach the Bible the same way that Jesus does. In matters of doctrine, ethics, and prophetic fulfillment, the Old Testament for them was the authoritative Word of God. We find nothing, anywhere, in what these men say or do that challenges either the authority or authenticity of any part of the Bible.

What do these passages below teach us about how the apostles understood the authority of God’s Word?

Acts 4:24–26 _____

Acts 13:32–36 _____

Rom. 9:17 _____

Gal. 3:8 _____

Notice in these passages how closely related the Scriptures are to the voice of God Himself. In Acts 4, just before being filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples praise God for the deliverance of Peter and John. In their praise, they raise their voices, acknowledging God as the Creator and for speaking through David His servant. That is, David’s words are God’s words. In Acts 13:32–36, David is quoted again by Paul, but his words are attributed to God, for verse 32 says: “What God promised to the fathers” (*RSV*).

In Romans 9:17, where one would expect God as the subject, Paul uses the term “Scripture,” saying: “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh” (*NKJV*), which could actually be stated, “For God says to the Pharaoh.” In Galatians 3:8 the subject “Scripture” is used in place of “God,” showing just how closely tied the Word of God is to God Himself.

In fact, the New Testament writers uniformly rely on the Old Testament as the Word of God. There are hundreds of quotes in the New Testament from the Old Testament. One scholar has compiled a list of 2,688 specific references: 400 from Isaiah, 370 from the Psalms, 220 from Exodus, and so on. If one were to add to this list allusions, themes, and motifs, the number would greatly increase. The books are replete with references to the Old Testament prophecies that are often introduced with the phrase, “it is written” (*Matt. 2:5, Mark 1:2, Mark 7:6, Luke 2:23, Luke 3:4, Rom. 3:4, Rom. 8:36, Rom. 9:33, 1 Cor. 1:19, Gal. 4:27, 1 Pet. 1:16*). All of this confirms that the Old Testament Scriptures are the foundation upon which the teachings of Jesus and the apostles rest.

What should these examples teach us about how dangerous any ideas are that would lessen our trust in the authority of the Scriptures?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “As a Child,” pp. 68–74, and “The Temptation,” pp. 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Men consider themselves wiser than the word of God, wiser even than God; and instead of planting their feet on the immovable foundation, and bringing everything to the test of God’s word, they test that word by their own ideas of science and nature, and if it seems not to agree with their scientific ideas, it is discarded as unworthy of credence.”
—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 27, 1884, p. 1.

“Those who become best acquainted with the wisdom and purpose of God as revealed in His word, become men and women of mental strength; and they may become efficient workers with the great Educator, Jesus Christ. . . . Christ has given His people the words of truth, and all are called to act a part in making them known to the world. . . . There is no sanctification aside from the truth, the word. Then how essential that it should be understood by every one!”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 432.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If Jesus, the Gospel writers, and Paul treated the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God, what should this tell us about why many of the modern views of Scripture today are wrong and why we should not fall for these arguments, no matter who teaches them?
- ❷ Just to give people an idea of where many modern biblical scholars have gone with their skepticism, here are a few things that many modern scholars deny. They reject a literal six-day Creation, accepting billions of years of evolution instead. They reject a sinless Adam in an unfallen world. They reject a universal worldwide flood. Some reject the literal existence of Abraham. Some reject the story of the Exodus. Some reject the miracles of Jesus, including even His bodily resurrection. Some reject the idea of predictive prophecy, in which prophets tell the future, sometimes centuries or even millennia in advance. What should these conclusions tell us about what happens when people start doubting the authority and authenticity of Scripture? Also, what are ways to try to help such people come to a clear understanding of truth?
- ❸ In response to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, how do we understand how all Scripture can be inspired, even the parts that are not necessarily applicable to us today?

Potluck Wins Hearts

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

On Sabbaths, vacationers flocked to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Russia's popular Black Sea resort city of Gelendzhik.

The visitors from Siberia, the Ural Mountains, and other far-flung Russian regions reminded the pastor, Andrey Prokopev, of something special he had learned while studying at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. When visitors came to the campus church, Prokopev and other students took turns providing them with a Sabbath fellowship meal afterward.

Prokopev proposed a similar Sabbath fellowship meal for guests at the Russian church. He suggested that the church's six Sabbath School classes, each with six to seven members, could take turns providing the food.

After the next Sabbath sermon, 20 vacationers in the congregation gladly accepted an invitation to stay for lunch in the church's kitchen. After the visitors were filled and happy, Prokopev asked them to introduce themselves and share how they became Adventists.

The resulting personal testimonies were powerful, and the church members enjoyed hearing them. Prokopev wanted more people to hear the stories, and he began to invite non-Adventist neighbors to church to worship and eat.

One Sabbath, an Adventist vacationer told a remarkable story about her grandfather, a cook who prepared food for soldiers traveling by train to the Western Front during World War II. The cook was much respected for his hard work and alcohol-free lifestyle, but he was an Adventist who refused to work on Sabbath. His superiors could not give him Saturdays off, but they didn't want to lose him. Finally, the commander summoned him.

"My friend, I will fire you on Friday," he said. "Then I will hire you on Sunday."

The arrangement worked well. For the rest of the war, the cook was fired every Friday and rehired every Sunday.

When the vacationer finished telling the story about her grandfather, a non-Adventist visitor at the table spoke up.

"I want to be an Adventist," she said.

To Prokopev's joy, he later baptized the woman. In all, four people, all attracted to Jesus through personal testimonies, have been baptized in the two years since the fellowship meals began.



PROKOPEV, 43, said fellowship meals with personal testimonies have been a huge blessing for his church and helped Sabbath School class members grow closer as they work together to care for guests.

"Personal testimonies are very important," he said. "They show God, His mercy, and His desire to be our God."

Key Texts: *Matt. 4:1–11; Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45; Luke 4:25–27; Acts 4:24–26.*

Part I: Overview

The cry of the Reformation was *ad fontes*—“back to the sources.” In the context of the Enlightenment, this motto meant that the Reformers decided to go back to Scripture as the original source in order truly to understand the nature of Christianity and the duties of a Christian. The Reformers rejected basing their understanding of Scripture on the traditions and abuses that had come to characterize the medieval church. Today, modern presuppositions that come from a secular worldview minimize the Bible and assume it is based on misguided and primitive ideas that need either to be adjusted or rejected. Thus, Christians also must “go back to the sources.” The primary example by which we should orient ourselves is Jesus Christ. How did He view the Scriptures? Did He express doubt about certain parts of scripture? Or did He instead quote from the Bible (the Old Testament in His time) as authoritative for all areas of life? This modern, scientific age denies the existence of God. At most, it claims that God does not interact with human history. Rather than follow these presuppositions, should we not test any such claim by what Scripture says that Jesus taught and, by example, believed? What about His disciples, the apostles, who wrote large portions of the New Testament? Did they not also follow His example? This week we are going back to Jesus and the apostles to see how they used and interpreted Scripture. We posit that their methods of interpretation and application still serve as a reliable guide and inspiration for us today.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

In 1521, Martin Luther was summoned by the Roman emperor to Worms, Germany, where he awaited trial by the council, or Diet. It was a turning point for the Reformation. Was Luther going to recant and repudiate his writings that had stirred all of Europe? Or would he uphold *sola Scriptura*, “the Bible alone,” as his standard? Luther stood before the emperor and the highest civil and ecclesiastical authorities. An etching from the artist Lucas Cranach that same year presents the clear-cut profile of Luther projecting strength and determination. When the

moment came, he spoke in a straightforward manner and with honesty: “ ‘Inasmuch as Your Majesty and Your Highnesses ask for a plain answer, I shall give one. . . . Unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scriptures and by evident reasoning—for I cannot trust the decisions of either popes or councils, since it is plain that they have frequently erred and contradicted one another—I am bound in conscience and held fast in the Word of God by those passages of the Holy Scriptures which I have quoted. Therefore, I cannot and will not retract anything, for it is neither safe nor salutary to act against one’s conscience. . . . God help me! Amen.’ ”—Heinrich Boehmer, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 415.

Scripture

A pivotal moment in earth’s history came when Satan tempted Jesus after His baptism and wilderness experience. Just 40 days earlier, the Father said at Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (*Matt. 3:17*). Satan now challenged this position. Was Jesus who His Father said He was? The issue was the reliability of God’s Word. In His first response, Jesus quotes a passage from Deuteronomy 8:3: “ ‘That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (*NKJV*). The context of this passage is God’s sustaining providence to ancient Israel when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. God humbled them and sustained them so that they would rely wholly on Him. By quoting this Scripture, Jesus is saying, “My Father who sustained Israel for 40 years will sustain Me. I trust in His Word alone because I know that He is not only the Source of sustenance, but the Source of life itself.” There also is a deeper implication here. Jesus is submitting Himself to His Father, just as ancient Israel was taught to submit to the Word of God. Jesus speaks not of His own authority but from the authority of Scripture as spoken by Moses. The argument in Deuteronomy is that because God sustained Israel and preserved them as His people to enter the Promised Land, they “shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him” (*Deut. 8:6, NKJV*).

“Jesus met Satan with the words of Scripture. ‘It is written,’ He said. In every temptation the weapon of His warfare was the word of God. Satan demanded of Christ a miracle as a sign of His divinity. But that which is greater than all miracles, a firm reliance upon a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ was a sign that could not be controverted. So long as Christ held to this position, the tempter could gain no advantage.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120. How do we approach temptation

today? Do we have Scripture hidden in our hearts that we may call upon in order to respond to the tempter? We are never forced to submit our wills to temptation, and we have the same resource as Jesus did—His Word.

Illustration

On October 23, 1844, there was intense grief and disappointment when the Advent believers woke up to the reality that Jesus had not returned to take them home as they had expected. They had sold homes and property. They had given everything for the proclamation of the news that Jesus was coming that day. Now their greatest hope was crushed. Some of the believers left the faith. Many faced the ridicule of skeptics who had doubted all along. What had gone wrong? Was everything that they learned from the study of the prophecies for nothing? But as they went back to Scripture, they were led to understand that the date was not wrong; rather, they had misunderstood the nature of the “cleansing of the sanctuary.” The cleansing of the sanctuary was not the destruction of the earth; it was the movement of Christ into the Most Holy Place to begin another phase of His atoning work. Study led the Advent believers to understand the prophecy of Revelation 10:9, 10—the sweet message of the book that became a bitter disappointment. This disappointment was not a new experience for the believers in Jesus. It had happened before.

Scripture

The disciples could not understand Christ’s death on the cross. They had believed with the rest of Judaism that the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom that would free them from the oppression of the Romans. Now that Jesus was dead and buried, they were devastated. The answer to their disappointment was the same as the answer to the early Advent believers. It was to turn back to Scripture. Jesus showed them the way. “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (*Luke 24:27, RSV*). This was a thorough exposition so that the disciples could see that everything written about Him “ ‘in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’ ” (*Luke 24:44, RSV*). Here we have another explicit reference to the three divisions of the Old Testament as encompassing “all scripture.” Jesus had prayed for His disciples, “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*). For Jesus, all Scripture was authoritative and the basis for His authority, ministry, and mission.

The disciples took the teaching of Jesus to heart and made it the core

of the gospels and letters to the church. Matthew quoted extensively from the prophecies of the Old Testament. Luke began his Gospel with the genealogies, demonstrating that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul affirms that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, *NKJV*). In Hebrews 11, Paul lists many of the men and women who were heroes of the faith, doing so in a way that takes their stories and original settings in the Old Testament at face value. Never do we find any New Testament writer doubting the authenticity, historicity, prophecies, or teachings of the Bible. They do not view the Scripture accounts in any way other than as authoritative. The examples of Jesus and the apostles give us the clearest evidence of how to approach the Scriptures. They allowed Scripture to interpret Scripture. They relied on Scripture as their defense during temptation and required a clear “thus saith the Lord” in the plainest understanding of the biblical text and its applications.

Part III: Life Application

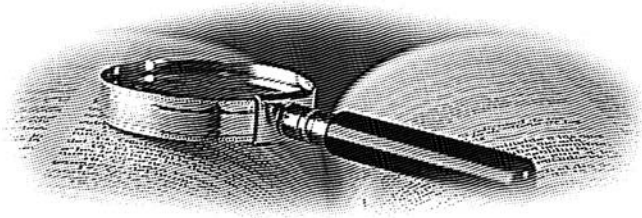
In the 1990s, the WWJD movement became popular among Christians. Young people wore plastic bracelets with the acronym WWJD, for “What Would Jesus Do?” This question also might be appropriate when we contemplate the question of how to approach the Bible. We might rephrase the acronym to WWJS, or “What would Jesus say?” What would Jesus say about modern interpretations that deny the historicity of major events in the Old Testament? What would Jesus say about arguments in favor of the belief that the Old Testament teaches a message different from the New Testament and should be minimized and relegated to a position of lesser authority? What would Jesus say to someone in the church who insists that certain passages of the New Testament are only applicable to the church (e.g., Ephesus or Corinth) to which a particular letter was addressed? Would Jesus limit the authority of the Bible? As Christ’s disciples, how do we emulate His approach to Scripture? Will we try to interpret and twist words as the Pharisees and Sadducees did to trap Jesus?

1. **Ask your class to recount experiences in which certain Scriptures came to mind when they were tempted to leave the side of Jesus. What kind of blessings do we receive from memorizing the Bible and storing it in our hearts? How many promises of God have you stored for a time when the Bible may not be in your possession any longer?**

2. Think of other examples of when Jesus and the apostles based their arguments on Scripture. How effective were such arguments?

Notes

The Bible—*the* Authoritative Source *of* Our Theology



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Mark 7:1–13; Rom. 2:4; 1 John 2:15–17; 2 Cor. 10:5, 6; John 5:46, 47; John 7:38.

Memory Text: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20, NKJV).

There is no Christian church that does not use Scripture to support its beliefs. Yet, the role and authority of Scripture in theology is not the same in all churches. In fact, the role of Scripture can vary greatly from church to church. This is an important but complex subject that we will explore by studying five different influential sources that impact our interpretation of Scripture: tradition, experience, culture, reason, and the Bible itself.

These sources play a significant role in every theology and in every church. We all are part of various traditions and cultures that impact us. We all have experiences that shape our thinking and influence our understanding. We all have a mind to think and to evaluate things. We all read the Bible and use it for our understanding of God and His will.

Which of these sources, or combinations of them, has the final authority in how we interpret the Bible, and how are they used in relation to each other? The priority given to any source or sources leads to very different emphases and results and will ultimately determine the direction of our entire theology.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.

Tradition

Tradition itself is not bad. It gives recurring acts in our daily life a certain routine and structure. It can help us to stay connected with our roots. Hence, it is no surprise that tradition also plays an important part in religion. But there are some dangers connected with tradition.

What does Mark 7:1–13 teach us about how Jesus reacted to some human traditions in His day?

The tradition Jesus confronted was carefully handed down in the Jewish community from teacher to pupil. In Jesus' day, it had assumed a place alongside Scripture. Tradition, however, has a tendency to grow over long periods of time, thus accumulating more and more details and aspects that were not originally part of God's Word and plan. These human traditions—even though they are promoted by respected "elders" (see Mark 7:3, 5), for example by the religious leaders of the Jewish community—are not equal to God's commandments (see Mark 7:8, 9). They were human traditions, and ultimately they led to a point where they made "the word of God of no effect" (Mark 7:13, NKJV).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. How do we distinguish between the Word of God and human tradition? Why is it so important that we make this distinction?

The living Word of God initiates in us a reverent and faithful attitude toward it. This faithfulness generates a certain tradition. Our faithfulness, however, always needs to be loyal to the living God, who has revealed His will in the Written Word of God. Thus, the Bible holds a unique role that supersedes all human traditions. The Bible stands higher and above all traditions, even good ones. Traditions that grow out of our experience with God and His Word constantly need to be tested against the measuring rod of Holy Scripture.

What are the things we do as a church that could be put under the label "tradition"? Why is it always important to distinguish them from a biblical teaching? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Experience

Read Romans 2:4 and Titus 3:4, 5. How do we experience the goodness, forbearance, forgiveness, kindness, and love of God? Why is it important that our faith be not just an abstract, intellectual knowledge, but something we actually experience? At the same time, in what ways can our experiences conflict with the Bible and even mislead us in our faith?

Experience is part of our human existence. It impacts our feelings and thoughts in a powerful way. God has designed us in such a way that our relationship to His creation, and even to God Himself, is significantly connected to and shaped by our experience.

It is God's desire that we experience the beauty of relationships, of art and music, and of the wonders of creation, as well as the joy of His salvation and the power of the promises of His Word. Our religion and faith are more than just doctrine and rational decisions. What we experience significantly shapes our view of God and even our understanding of His Word. But we also need to see clearly the limitations and insufficiencies of our experiences when it comes to knowing God's will.

What warning is found in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3? What should this tell us about the limits of trusting our experiences?

Experiences can be very deceiving. Biblically speaking, experience needs to have its proper sphere. It needs to be informed and shaped by Scripture and interpreted by Scripture. Sometimes we want to experience something that is out of harmony with God's Word and will. Here we need to learn to trust the Word of God even over our experience and desires. We should be on guard to make sure that even our experience is always in harmony with the Word of God and does not contradict the clear teaching of the Bible.

A faith in which love for God and love for others (see Mark 12:28–31) are the chief commandments is, obviously, a faith in which experience is important. At the same time, why is it crucial that we *always* test our experience through the Word of God?

Culture

We all belong to and are part of a particular culture or cultures. We are all influenced and shaped by culture, too. None of us escapes it. Indeed, think about how much of the Old Testament is the story of ancient Israel's being corrupted by the cultures around it. What makes us think that we today are any different, or better?

The Word of God also is given in a specific culture, even though it is not limited to this one culture. While cultural factors unavoidably influence our understanding of the Bible, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Bible also transcends established cultural categories of ethnicity, empire, and social status. This is one reason why the Bible surpasses any human culture and is even capable of transforming and correcting the sinful elements that we find in every culture.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What does John mean when he states that we should not love the things of the world? How can we live in the world and yet not have a worldly mind-set?

Culture, like any other facet of God's creation, is affected by sin. Consequently, it also stands under the judgment of God. Yes, some aspects of our culture might align very nicely with our faith, but we must always be careful to distinguish between the two. Ideally, biblical faith should challenge, if need be, the existing culture and create a counterculture that is faithful to God's Word. Unless we have something anchored in us that comes from above us, we will soon give in to that which is around us.

Ellen G. White provides the following insight:

"The followers of Christ are to be separate from the world in principles and interests, but they are not to isolate themselves from the world. The Saviour mingled constantly with men, not to encourage them in anything that was not in accordance with God's will, but to uplift and ennoble them."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 323.

What aspects of your culture are in complete opposition to biblical faith? More important, how do we stand firm against those aspects attempting to corrupt our faith?

Reason

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5, 6; Proverbs 1:7; and Proverbs 9:10. Why is obedience to Christ in our thoughts so important? Why is the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom?

God has given us the ability to think and to reason. Every human activity and every theological argument assumes our ability to think and to draw conclusions. We do not endorse an unreasonable faith. In the wake of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment, however, human reason assumed a new and dominant role, especially in Western society, that goes far beyond our ability to think and to arrive at correct conclusions.

In contrast to the idea that all our knowledge is based on sensory experience, another view regards human reason as the chief source of knowledge. This view, called rationalism, is the idea that truth is not sensory but intellectual and is derived from reason. In other words, certain truths exist, and our reason alone can directly grasp them. This makes human reason the test and norm for truth. Reason became the new authority before which everything else had to bow, including the authority of the church and, more dramatically, even the authority of the Bible as God's Word. Everything that was not self-evident to human reason was discarded and its legitimacy questioned. This attitude affected large parts of Scripture. All miracles and supernatural acts of God, such as the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the virgin birth, or the six-day Creation, to name but a few, were no longer considered true and trustworthy.

The truth is, we should remember the fact that even our reasoning power is affected by sin and needs to be brought under the reign of Christ. Human beings are darkened in their understanding and alienated from God (*Eph. 4:18*). We need to be enlightened by God's Word. Furthermore, the fact that God is our Creator indicates that, biblically speaking, our human reason is not created as something that functions independently or autonomously of God. Rather, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (*Prov. 9:10; compare with Prov. 1:7*). It is only when we accept God's revelation, embodied in the Written Word of God, as supreme in our lives, and are willing to follow what is written in the Bible, that we can reason correctly.

Centuries ago, American President Thomas Jefferson made his own version of the New Testament by cutting out anything that, in his view, went against reason. Gone were almost all of the miracles of Jesus, including His resurrection. What should this alone teach us about the limits of human reason for understanding truth?

The Bible

The Holy Spirit, who has revealed and inspired the content of the Bible to human beings, will never lead us contrary to God's Word or astray from the Word of God. For Seventh-day Adventists, the Bible has a higher authority than human tradition, experience, reason, or culture. The Bible alone is the norm by which everything else needs to be tested.

Read John 5:46, 47 and John 7:38. For Jesus Christ, the Bible is the ultimate source for understanding spiritual matters. How does the Bible confirm that Jesus is the true Messiah?

Some people claim to have received special “revelations” and instructions from the Holy Spirit, but these go against the clear message of the Bible. For them the Holy Spirit has attained a higher authority than God's Word. Whoever nullifies the written and inspired Word of God and evades its clear message, is walking on dangerous ground and is not following the leading of God's Spirit. The Bible is our only spiritual safeguard. It alone is a reliable norm for all matters of faith and practice.

“Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

The Holy Spirit should never be understood to replace the Word of God. Rather, He works in harmony with and through the Bible to draw us to Christ, thus making the Bible the only norm for authentic biblical spirituality. The Bible provides sound doctrine (*see 1 Tim. 4:6*), and as God's Word is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. It is not our task to sit in judgment over Scripture. The Word of God, rather, has the right and the authority to judge us and our thinking. After all, it is the Written Word of God Himself.

Why is the Bible a safer guide in spiritual questions than are subjective impressions? What are the consequences when we do not accept the Bible as the standard by which we test all teachings and even our spiritual experience? If private revelation were the final word in spiritual questions, why would this lead to nothing but chaos and error?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602, in *The Great Controversy*.

Tradition, experience, culture, reason, and the Bible are all present in our reflection on the Word of God. But we need to ask a decisive question: Which of these sources has the final say and the ultimate authority in our theology? It is one thing to affirm the Bible, but it is something else altogether to allow the Bible, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to impact and change the life.

In one sense, culture, experience, reason and even tradition, in and of themselves, might not of necessity be bad. They become problems when they contradict what Scripture teaches. But that is, often, to be expected. What’s worse, however, is when these things take precedence over the Word of God. So much of the history of apostasy in both Old Testament and New Testament times is when outside influences took precedence over divine revelation.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it easier to uphold details of some human traditions than to live the spirit of God’s law: to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and our neighbor as ourself (see Matt. 22:37–40)?
- ❷ In class, discuss your answer to Sunday’s final question. What role should tradition play in our church? Where do you see blessings and challenges in religious traditions?
- ❸ How can we make sure that tradition, no matter how good it may be, does not supersede the Written Word of God as our final norm and authority?
- ❹ Suppose someone claims to have had a dream in which the Lord spoke to him or her, telling him or her that Sunday is the true day of rest and worship for New Testament times. How would you respond to that person, and what does a story like this teach us about how experience must always be tested by the Word of God?
- ❺ In class, talk about the culture in which your church finds itself immersed. How does that culture impact your faith? What examples can we find from history in which culture greatly impacted the actions of church members in a way that, looking back now, we see as negative? What lessons can we take from this for ourselves today so that we don’t make similar mistakes?

Surprise Package in Finland

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Six-year-old Timo Flink looked with awe at a picture of Jesus' second coming in Arthur Maxwell's *The Bible Story*. Unable to read, he stared at Jesus sitting on a cloud of angels. *I want to be up with the angels*, Flink thought.

As a young adult, he wanted to serve God but became distracted with computers. As he studied to become a software engineer, he joined a group of young adults who discussed the Bible every Friday evening with a pastor.

Soon the group became embroiled in a debate about infant baptism. Flink's church practiced infant baptism, but several young people in the group belonged to another Sunday church that baptized by immersion. Flink was surprised that his pastor defended infant baptism but couldn't support the practice biblically.

At that time, Flink joined a Revelation study group. He sensed that the book was important, but he couldn't understand it. He prayed for understanding. At the height of his confusion, he visited his parents during spring break. Sitting down to eat, he was surprised to see a book. His father didn't read much, and he wondered why he had the book. "What's this?" he asked.

"The postman delivered it yesterday," his father said. "It's from a distant relative."

Flink took a closer look at the book. Its title was *The Great Controversy*, and in smaller text he read the words "Ancient prophecies are coming true." At that moment, he remembered the picture of Jesus' second coming from his childhood. Three days later, he had finished the book. It answered all his questions about Revelation and infant baptism. *This is what I have been looking for*, he thought.

Flink read the book again that summer and a third time in the fall. Then he saw a newspaper advertisement for a Daniel seminar at the Adventist church. He had read about Adventists in *The Great Controversy*, and he went. He was baptized. An article about his baptism subsequently appeared in a church magazine, which publishes announcements about all baptisms. Across Finland, the distant relative who had mailed the book rejoiced at the news.

FLINK, pictured, gave up computers to become a pastor and now is 45 and communication director for the Adventist Church in Finland. He doesn't know how *The Bible Story* ended up in his grandmother's house. She found the Finnish-language edition, and he looked at it when he visited her. *The Great Controversy* also holds a special place in his heart. Every Friday evening, he reads from the book for family worship. "My wife thought we needed to teach our children the more serious side of what we are facing now," he said. "So we decided to do *The Great Controversy*." Finland is part of the Trans-European Division, which will receive the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter.



Key Texts: *Isa. 8:20; Mark 7:1–13; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 3:6; Rom. 2:4; Titus 3:4, 5; 1 John 2:15–17; 2 Cor. 10:5, 6; Prov. 1:7; Prov. 9:10; John 5:46–48; John 7:38.*

Part I: Overview

Often we are not aware of the influence of other sources on our thinking and on our theology. Even if we want to live by Scripture alone, our understanding of Scripture is significantly shaped and influenced by a number of factors: the traditions we are used to and grew up with, the way we are trained to think and how we use our reason in explaining things, our experience with certain people and ideas, and the formative culture around us. The priority given to any source or combination of sources has a significant influence on our theology; ultimately, it will determine the direction of the entire theological enterprise. In Catholic and Orthodox churches, tradition often plays an important and decisive role. In charismatic and Pentecostal churches, experience often is credited as final authority. In liberal theology, human reason often assumes the last word that decides what is acceptable or not. Furthermore, every church is impacted to some degree by the local culture. And no church exists without the Bible. We don't want a faith that is devoid of any experience, and in which we don't think—a faith that is unreasonable and not blessed by positive traditions. It is important to be aware of all those influences and to understand the positive contribution that each source has on our faith. But it is vitally important to see clearly the limitations of each source, too. Here is the decisive question: To which source do we grant the ultimate and highest authority in matters of faith and practice?

Part II: Commentary

Tradition

Tradition often has a bad reputation. It is associated with a certain narrow-mindedness that slavishly sticks to the rigid repetition and performance of certain rituals and practices. But tradition is not all bad.

Think of some positive aspects that any tradition might have. It gives reoccurring acts of structure and stability. It connects us with our pasts and perhaps even our origins. It transmits values and things that are important to us. It helps to keep alive the memory of significant events and things. All these things are good.

The problem arises when those traditions gain a life of their own and ultimately become more significant than the original things they try to preserve. Traditions also tend to grow over time and are prone to add aspects that go way beyond the initial thing that triggered the tradition.

In Galatians 1:9, Paul admonishes the believers not to preach another gospel than the one that they had received. Thus, there is a tradition that God has initiated, but there also are human traditions that are not originally part of God's plan or God's Word.

Experience

Human beings are created with the ability to experience love. We are able to experience beauty, harmony, music, and art and can relate to things and other relationships in far more than just a rational manner. Experience is part of our lives and forms a significant part of our spiritual lives with God.

Think of aspects of your faith where the experience of joy, forgiveness, a clear conscience, and acts of kindness and love have positively impacted your relationship with God and with other believers.

Where has the experience of rejection, prejudice, hate, suspicion, doubt, envy, and jealousy negatively impacted your relationship with and understanding of God? What does that teach us about our responsibility to be living letters of Christ (*2 Cor. 3:2, 3*) that other people might read when they want to learn something about God?

Illustration

Our human experience is not only powerful but also can be deceptive and misleading. How would you react if a charismatic Christian tells you that in her experience God has told her to worship God on Sunday, whereas the Bible clearly states that the seventh-day Sabbath is the sacred day of rest for God? What should we do if the experience of one particular spiritual gift is made the norm for what it means to live a Spirit-filled life?

Culture

The English word *culture* stems from the Latin word *cultura*, stemming, in turn, from *colere*, meaning to cultivate. Culture encompasses, among other things, the set of customs, values, social behavior, and norms found in human societies. God has given us the ability to shape culture, yet at the same time all of us are influenced by the respective culture(s) we live in.

The Bible came into being in a specific culture. It helps to be familiar with the culture of Scripture in order to understand better some of its statements. The culture of Scripture does not make Scripture relative to culture. After all, Scripture is the revealed Word of God. As such, the Bible can have a positive impact on human culture and uplift any society.

List examples where biblical thought has changed society and your culture for the better or where it could have a positive impact on our society and culture. Think with your Sabbath School members about strategies for introducing the Bible and biblical ideas in ways that will be well received, creating a positive biblical counterculture in our society.

No culture is perfect, and every culture is affected by sin. Hence, not everything in culture is positive. Some cultural things might have a negative impact on our faith or might even be demonic in origin. How can we distinguish between positive and negative aspects of our culture? How can we avoid simply copying our culture in our worship? Why do we have to be culturally relevant in order to reach other people? How can the Bible be the final norm in this pursuit?

Reason

God created us with the ability to think. Much of the Bible calls us to reflect upon what is written in Scripture and stimulates our thoughts and thinking. The repeated question “What do you think?” (*Matt. 17:25, Matt. 18:12, Matt. 21:28, Matt. 22:17, Matt. 22:42, Matt. 26:66, etc.*) or the related question “Have you not read?” (*Matt. 12:3, 5; Matt. 19:4; Matt. 21:16; Matt. 21:42; Matt. 22:31; etc.*) implies that God wants us to use our minds in understanding Him and His Word. While we can understand God correctly and truthfully, we have to acknowledge that we will never *fully* comprehend everything about God. After all, we are created beings. We are not God! Furthermore, our thinking is darkened and affected by sin. Therefore, we need to bring even our thinking “into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (*2 Cor. 10:5, NKJV*). If we are not willing to submit our thinking to the higher authority of Scripture, we will quickly start judging more and more parts of Scripture according to what we think is reasonable and true, thus making our reason the norm for what we can accept or not. This mind-set will eliminate the miracles in the Bible and will affect biblical truths such as the doctrine of God and His triune nature or the divinity of Christ or the personality of the Holy Spirit or the bodily resurrection or the relationship between human free will and God’s

sovereignty, to name but a few teachings. In the end, “a *critical* method must fail, because it presents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpoint to revelation is not critique but obedience; it is not correction . . . but it is a let-me-be-corrected.”—Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 23.

The Bible

The Bible is our highest and most definitive authority in all matters of faith and practice, because we believe that the Holy Spirit has inspired the writers of the Bible to write down in a trustworthy and reliable manner what God wants to communicate through them. Jesus and the apostles treated Scripture with this understanding. For Jesus, the Word of God is truth (*John 17:17*). As far as Jesus is concerned, if we don’t believe Moses, we will not believe His words (*John 5:46, 47*). For Jesus, the Scriptures are the norm for our faith: “ ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’ ” (*John 7:38, NKJV*). In a similar manner, the apostles repeatedly referred back to Scripture as the norm of their teaching (*Acts 17:11, Rom. 10:11, etc.*) and believed Scripture, “for whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4, NKJV*). We can’t be more apostolic in our treatment of Scripture than the apostles themselves were, and we can’t be more Christian than Christ Himself was. He is our example. We do well to follow His footsteps in the way He used and constantly referred to Scripture as the decisive norm for His faith.

Part III: Life Application

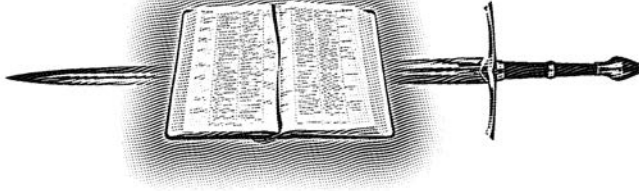
When we love another person, several of the factors we have discussed this week come into play. In love, we experience some strong feelings. Yet, love is more than just a feeling. When we love another person, we normally have some good reasons as to why our love for this person is real and why the other person loves us. Yet, it is not wise to ground our love on reason alone. When we start a loving relationship, we tend to develop some common practices or traditions that remind us of meaningful moments together. But when those traditions become more important than the relationship itself, they have gone astray, and we have lost something essential. When we show our love for another person, we normally do it in ways that resemble and reflect the common customs and norms of our culture. But when we permit only culture to define how love should

be practiced, we can quickly be led to do things that are explicitly forbidden in Scripture. For this reason, we need a source that guides and informs our love and our lives that is not just of human origin. We need a reliable source that goes deeper than what we feel, is higher than what we think, and is more meaningful than any human tradition or culture. Thank God for His enduring and trustworthy Word that we find in the Bible.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

By Scripture Alone— *Sola Scriptura*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 1 Cor. 4:1–6; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 24:27, 44, 45; Isa. 8:20.

Memory Text: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV).

The Protestant claim of “Scripture alone” (*sola Scriptura*) elevated Scripture to the sole standard and decisive source for theology. In contrast to Roman Catholic theology, which emphasized Scripture *and* tradition, the Protestant faith emphasized the keyword “alone”; that is, Scripture *alone* is the final authority when matters of faith and doctrine are at issue.

It was the Bible that gave the decisive force and authority to the Protestant Reformation and its revolt against Rome and the errors it had been teaching for centuries. Over against an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, where many different meanings were read into the biblical text, the Protestant Reformers emphasized the importance of a grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible, which took seriously the grammar and literal meaning of the biblical text.

This week we will look at *sola Scriptura* in greater detail. We will learn that *sola Scriptura* implies some fundamental principles of biblical interpretation that are indispensable for a proper understanding of God's Word. As Protestants, we must maintain the Bible as the ultimate doctrinal authority.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

Scripture as the Ruling Norm

From their beginning, Seventh-day Adventists have considered themselves to be people of the Book, that is, Bible-believing Christians. To affirm the biblical principle of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), we acknowledge the unique authority of the Bible. Scripture *alone* is the ruling norm for our theology and the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. Other sources, such as religious experience, human reason, or tradition, are subservient to the Bible. In fact, the *sola Scriptura* principle was intended to safeguard the authority of Scripture from dependence upon the church and its interpretation, and it ruled out the possibility that the standard of its interpretation should come from outside the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1–6, especially verse 6, in which Paul says we should not go “beyond what is written.” Why is this point so crucial for our faith?

Not to go beyond what is written does not exclude insights from other fields of study, such as biblical archaeology or history. Other fields may shed light on some biblical aspects and the background of scriptural passages, and thus may help us to understand the biblical text better. Nor does it exclude the help of other resources in the task of interpretation, such as lexicons, dictionaries, concordances, and other books and commentaries. However, in the proper interpretation of the Bible, the text of Scripture has priority over all other aspects, sciences, and secondary helps. Other viewpoints have to be evaluated carefully from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.

What we positively affirm when we practice the *sola Scriptura* principle is that if a conflict arises in the interpretation of our faith, then Scripture alone carries the authority that transcends and judges any other source or church tradition. We should not go beyond or against what is written in the Bible. True Christianity and convincing, gospel preaching depend on a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture.

“Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth.”—Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 32: *Career of the Reformer II*, eds. Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 11, 12.

Read Acts 17:10, 11. How do these verses inform what we’re talking about here regarding the primacy of Scripture?

The Unity of Scripture

The Bible itself claims that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV) and that “no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation,” and that men “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20, 21, NIV). With God as the Bible’s ultimate author, we can assume a fundamental unity and harmony among the various parts of Scripture in regard to the key issues it teaches.

Read Titus 1:9 and 2 Timothy 1:13. Why is the unity of the Bible important for our belief?

Only on the basis of its internal unity, a unity that is derived from its divine inspiration, can Scripture function as its own interpreter. If Scripture did not have an overarching unity in its teachings, we could not come up with a harmony in doctrine on any given issue. Without the unity of the Bible, the church would have no means to distinguish truth from error and to repudiate heresy. It would have no basis to apply disciplinary measures or to correct deviations from God’s truth. Scripture would lose its convincing and liberating power.

Jesus and the biblical writers, however, assume the unity of Scripture, which is based on its divine origin. We can see this in their common practice of quoting several Old Testament books as of equal and harmonious weight (*Rom. 3:10–18*; here Paul makes use of scriptural citations from Ecclesiastes [7:20], Psalms [14:2, 3; 5:9; 10:7], and Isaiah [59:7, 8]).

The Bible writers considered Scripture to be an inseparable, coherent whole in which major themes are further developed. There is no discord between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament does not contain a new gospel or a new religion. The Old Testament is unfolded in the New Testament, and the New Testament builds upon the Old Testament. As such, the two Testaments have a reciprocal relationship in which they shed light upon each other.

The unity of Scripture also implies that all of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*) should be taken into consideration when we study a biblical subject, rather than building our teaching only on isolated statements.

What should we do when we come across texts or ideas that appear contradictory to each other in the Bible? How do we work to resolve them?

The Clarity of Scripture

Any appeal to Scripture alone makes little sense if the text of the Bible is unclear in its meaning.

Read Matthew 21:42; Matthew 12:3, 5; Matthew 19:4; Matthew 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3; Matthew 24:15; and Mark 13:14. What does Jesus' repeated referral to Scripture imply in regard to the clarity of its message?

The biblical testimony is unambiguous: the Bible is sufficiently clear in what it teaches. The Bible is so clear that it can be understood by children and by adults alike, especially in its most basic teachings. And yet there are endless opportunities for our knowledge and understanding to grow deeper. We do not need any ecclesiastical magisterium to provide the Bible's meaning for us. Instead, its basic teachings can be understood by all believers. It assumes the priesthood of all believers rather than restricting its interpretation to a select few, such as the clerical priesthood. Therefore, we are encouraged in the Bible to study Scripture for ourselves because we are able to understand God's message to us.

It has been aptly pointed out that "the consistent example of the Bible writers shows that the Scriptures are to be taken in their plain, literal sense, unless a clear and obvious figure is intended. . . . There is no stripping away of the 'husk' of the literal sense in order to arrive at the 'kernel' of a mystical, hidden, allegorical meaning, that only the initiated can uncover."—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), p. 65. Rather, the clarity of the Bible pertains to the language, sense, and words of Scripture because there is a definite truth intended by the biblical writers rather than subjective, uncontrolled, multiple meanings of the biblical text.

None of this means that we won't, at times, come across texts and ideas that we don't fully understand or grasp. After all, this is the Word of God, and we are but fallen human beings. Nevertheless, God's Word is sufficiently clear on the things that we really need to know and understand, especially in relation to the question of salvation.

Think about a time when you didn't understand some texts, only to have them clarified later. What did you learn from that experience that perhaps could help others struggling with something similar?

Scripture Interprets Scripture

Only because there is an underlying unity of Scripture can the Bible function as its own interpreter. Without such unity, Scripture could not be the light that reveals its own meaning, where one portion of Scripture interprets other portions and thus becomes the key to understanding related passages.

Read Luke 24:27, 44, 45. How does Jesus refer back to Scripture to explain who He is? What does this teach us about how we can use Scripture?

The beauty of letting Scripture interpret Scripture is that it sheds further light on its own meaning. In doing so, we do not indiscriminately string together various passages to prove our opinion. Instead, we carefully take into consideration the context of each passage. Besides the immediate context before and after a passage under investigation, we should take into consideration the context of the book in which the passage is found. Furthermore, since according to Paul in Scripture, “everything that was written in the past was written to teach us” (*Rom. 15:4, NIV*), we should study all that Scripture says on a given subject.

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190.

When we compare Scripture with Scripture, it is important to study the Bible thoroughly. If possible, we should do so in its original languages, or at least with an appropriate Bible translation faithful to the meaning contained in the original Hebrew and Greek. Though knowledge of the original languages is not necessary to have a good understanding of the Bible, it certainly helps when possible. If not, faithful and prayerful study of the Word, with an attitude of humility and submission, will still surely bear great fruit.

Think of a doctrine, such as the state of the dead, for which focusing on a few select passages could lead to error if other passages are ignored. What does this tell us about how important it is to gather and read all that the Bible says about a topic in order to understand best what the Bible teaches?

Sola Scriptura and Ellen G. White

Read Isaiah 8:20. Why is it always important to refer back to the biblical “law and testimony” as the norms for our teaching and doctrine? What does this mean for the ministry of prophets who have not become part of the biblical canon?

When we talk about *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), Seventh-day Adventists are inevitably confronted with the question of what to do with Ellen G. White, who also was inspired by God and served as God’s messenger to His remnant people. What is the relationship of her writings to Scripture?

Even a cursory reading of Ellen G. White’s writings shows clearly that for her, the Bible was foundational and central in all her thought and theology. In fact, she repeatedly affirmed that the Bible is the highest authority and ultimate norm and standard for all doctrines, faith, and practice (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 595). Moreover, she clearly supported and upheld the great Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 9).

In Ellen G. White’s own view, her writings, when compared with Scripture, were a “lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light,” the Bible (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 20, 1903). Her writings are never a shortcut to or replacement for any serious Bible study. In fact, she comments: “You are not familiar with the Scriptures. If you had made God’s word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the *Testimonies*. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourself with God’s inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 605.

As such, her writings are to be appreciated. They share the same kind of inspiration as the biblical writers had, but they have a different function than does the Bible. Her writings are not an addition to Scripture but are subject to Holy Scripture. She never intended her writings to take the place of Scripture; instead, she elevated the Bible as the only standard for faith and practice.

Think about what an incredible gift we have been given through the ministry of Ellen G. White. How can we learn to appreciate better the amazing light coming from her while also upholding the supremacy of Scripture?

Further Thought: In the chapter “Biblical Interpretation” in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, read the sections The Analogy of Scripture: “Scripture Is Its Own Interpreter,” The Consistency of Scripture, and The Clarity of Scripture, pp. 64–66. Read chapter 20, “Bible Teaching and Study,” in the book *Education*, pp. 185–192; “The Primacy of the Word” in *Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 29–33.

“The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says. A true knowledge of the Bible can be gained only through the aid of that Spirit by whom the word was given. And in order to gain this knowledge we must live by it. All that God’s word commands, we are to obey. . . . The study of the Bible demands our most diligent effort and persevering thought. As the miner digs for the golden treasure in the earth, so earnestly, persistently, must we seek for the treasure of God’s word.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 189.

“When you make the Bible your food, your meat, and your drink, when you make its principles the elements of your character, you will know better how to receive counsel from God. I exalt the precious word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, ‘Sister White said this,’ and ‘Sister White said that.’ Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 33.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What erroneous beliefs do people hold because they have looked at only a few select texts rather than at all that the Bible says about a topic?
- ❷ In Matthew 11:11, Jesus said of John the Baptist: “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he’ ” (NKJV). Jesus points to a prophet here who has no writings in the Bible and yet said such things about Him. What should this tell us about why a true prophet does not have to have a book in the Bible and can still be a true prophet? What message can we Seventh-day Adventists take away from this fact?
- ❸ As Adventists, we’re not alone in claiming the Bible as our final authority. Other churches do so, as well. How, then, do we explain the contradictory doctrines that other Christians claim to find in the Bible, as well?

Road to Jesus

By ANTONIS MATSOUKAROS

I grew up in Cyprus, a Christian country. But my family was only nominally Christian.

When I was 12, I became sick, and no doctor could make me well. So, I began to seek God. I visited various churches in the hope of finding healing. I bowed before images and lit candles, thinking my actions would convince God to help me. But it didn't work.

Many years later, when I was 30, I found a leaflet under my door advertising a series of lectures on archaeological and spiritual matters in a public hall. The topic for each night was listed. Although I didn't know it at the time, the meetings were organized by the Seventh-day Adventist church.

I was not interested. But one topic, about midway through the list of topics, caught my attention: "The Antichrist and the Number 666." I decided to attend that one lecture.

The lively presentation intrigued me, and I ended up attending the remaining meetings. At the conclusion, the organizers invited attendees to worship at a Seventh-day Adventist church.

I began attending regularly and eventually became convicted about the Advent message. But I hesitated about baptism. Nicosia is a fairly small city, and the society is fairly close-knit, so I wondered how my friends and family would react if they discovered that I had abandoned my childhood church to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

For 10 years, I pondered whether it was important to be baptized. Would it make me a better person? Was I ready to follow this church and its lifestyle?

The pastor was very patient. Over time we became good friends. After some gentle encouragement, I was baptized.

I have never regretted that decision.

Several years have passed since that beautiful day. Today I am 55 and active in our small church family. I teach the Sabbath School and have worked with a new pastor to build a website to reach the people of Cyprus.



Jesus is coming soon, and when He does, I will finally be healed of my lingering illness. Even more important, we want the people of Cyprus and around the world to know and be ready.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia for Matsoukaros's congregation and two other congregations. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Key Texts: Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 4:6; Isa. 8:20; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Luke 24:27, 44, 45.

Part I: Overview

The Bible and Protestantism are intertwined in a common history. It could be said that the history of Christianity is in some sense the history of the interpretation of the Bible. *Sola Scriptura*—by Scripture alone—has been the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* elevated the role of Scripture to the sole standard and normative source for theology. Additionally, *sola Scriptura* was an instrument for criticizing ecclesiastical power structures and long-standing church traditions. It gave the Bible back into the hands of ordinary people. As such, *sola Scriptura* is the critical governing principle that directs the life of the church. It denotes the conviction that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the one and only criterion for Christian faith and living. What we believe in matters of faith is true only if our beliefs correspond to the witness of the whole of Scripture, to all of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*). This precept implies the unity of Scripture and the premise that the Bible is sufficiently clear in what it states.

Thus, *sola Scriptura* is far more than just a Reformation slogan. Without the Bible, the Reformation would not have been able to accomplish what it did. *Sola Scriptura* also implies a number of important principles for the interpretation of Scripture that are inextricably intertwined with the *sola Scriptura* principle. This week we will look more closely at some of these principles of interpretation.

Part II: Commentary

When we affirm the importance of *sola Scriptura* for our faith, we acknowledge the unique divine authority of the Bible over any other source that might influence our theology. *Sola Scriptura* does not mean *solo Scriptura* (unaccompanied Scripture). There are other sources that are inevitably part of what we believe. But Scripture alone is the ruling norm and final authority over every other source when it comes to matters of faith and practice. Scripture stands above any creed of the church. Scripture is not subject to the judgment of science or the voice of the majority, nor to any tradition, reason, or experience. In the words of Ellen G. White: “But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the

creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

The Bible has this magisterial role because of its divine origin and authority. Thus, we should not say less than what Scripture affirms. Nor should we add to the words of Scripture and go beyond its clear teachings. At the end of the last book of the Bible, we read the following warning that can be applied to all of Scripture: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (*Rev. 22:18, 19, NKJV*).

Why do you think it is important not to add to or take away from the words of Scripture? What would happen if we added to, or subtracted from, its truth? What would such addition or subtraction mean for the authority of Scripture? What does this answer tell us about the authority of the person who adds or takes away sections of Scripture?

Scripture alone is the ruling norm for our faith. This precept implies a number of other aspects and principles, as follows:

The Unity of Scripture

That Scripture can function as a theological guide and norm is possible only because of its internal unity. This unity is the result of its divine inspiration. Unity is not superimposed on Scripture but flows out of its divine origin. The Bible itself testifies to this unity by the fact that New Testament writers quote from basically all of the Old Testament (the Scripture of their times); also the words of Jesus and the New Testament writings were put on the same authoritative level as the Old Testament (*see Luke 10:16, 2 Pet. 3:16*). Thus, no part of Scripture is more authoritative than another part. The New Testament is not above the Old Testament; and the Old Testament is unfolded in the New Testament.

If there were no divine inspiration, there would be no unity in Scripture. Without God's inspiration, we would have only disparate and contradictory biblical writings. Without the unity of Scripture, we would not be able to develop a comprehensive biblical theology. We could talk only about the diverse and inconsistent theologies of various biblical writers. Only the unity of Scripture allows us to take *all* of Scripture into consideration and to compare Scripture with Scripture. If there were no unity of Scripture, we could no longer compare Scripture with Scripture. We could no longer refer back to Scripture to settle questions. The unity of Scripture has far-reaching implications for our theology. Without a basic unity of Scripture, we would not be able to distinguish truth from error. Nor could we any longer oppose theological heresy. Without the unity of Scripture, we would end up with a plurality of disparate beliefs in the Bible, and the Bible would be full of contradictions and inconsistencies. Thus, the Bible would have effectively lost its ability to be the norm and guide for what we believe, and it could not be used to bring theological unity among the believers.

Application: Today there are some who claim that the New Testament is more authoritative than the Old Testament. They state that the Old Testament teaches wrath and vengeance and a salvation that is based on our works, whereas in the New Testament we find love and mercy, forgiveness, and grace. Thus, there is no unity of thought. Hence, the New Testament, and especially the words of Jesus, are placed above the words of the Old Testament. How would you respond to such a position? Where do you see problems with this approach? What implications does this view have for the authority of the Bible?

The Clarity of Scripture

When we appeal to Scripture alone, we also implicitly express our conviction that what Scripture states is sufficiently clear to be understood so that we can put it into practice. Perhaps the most difficult texts in the Bible are not those that challenge us in our limited understanding. Rather, the most difficult texts may be those that we clearly understand but often resist following. The Bible can be clearly understood by children and adults alike. Yet, there is an infinite scope to Scripture's truths beyond what we know. Thus, even the most educated minds have ample room to grow in deeper understanding and knowledge.

Scripture repeatedly affirms that it is clear enough to be understood by those who read and hear it (*see Neh. 8:8, 12; Eph. 3:4; Matt. 21:42; Matt. 12:3, 5; Matt. 19:4; Matt. 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3*).

Because there is a sufficient clarity of Scripture, we are held fully responsible for what we do or fail to do, when we understand it.

What good would Scripture be if it were obscure and unclear? Could it then function as both a norm and a guide? Explain.

Scripture Interprets Scripture

Because of the unity of Scripture, the Bible can function as its own interpreter. One part of Scripture can throw light on other parts. Thus, we should carefully take into consideration the historical and literary contexts of biblical statements, rather than just lumping together passages in which the same word occurs. When we give Scripture a chance to shed light on other parts of Scripture in which the same ideas and words show up, we should take into consideration all that Scripture has to say about a given subject. A careful comparison and study of Scripture should have priority over any commentary or secondary author who writes on Bible topics or gives an interpretation of Scripture. Even Ellen G. White should not be used as a shortcut to careful Bible study. While we may gain valuable insights from her comments, she is no replacement for a thorough investigation of the Bible itself.

Part III: Life Application

We don't need priests or the teaching magisterium of the church or other authorities to interpret Scripture for us. There is a priesthood of all believers. Yet, there is wisdom in the collective knowledge of those who also study the Bible. God also guides our fellow believers, and new light will stand the test of closest investigation by those who also cherish the message of the Bible. In the words of Ellen G. White: "God has not passed His people by and chosen one solitary man here and another there as the only ones worthy to be entrusted with His truth. He does not give one man new light contrary to the established faith of the body. . . . Let none be self-confident, as though God had given them special light above their brethren. . . . One accepts some new and original idea which does not seem to conflict with the truth. He . . . dwells upon it until it seems to him to be clothed with beauty and importance, for Satan has power to give this false appearance. At last it becomes the all-absorbing theme, the one great point around which everything centers, and the truth is uprooted from the heart. . . . I warn you to beware of these side issues, whose tendency is to divert the mind from the truth. Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension." —Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 90, 91.

UNITED BY MISSION



Glenn Lie



Silvia Leppälä



Emmanuel Mirilov

A 55-year-old schoolteacher wears a flight attendant's shirt in Norway. A 23-year-old student quits drinking and helps at a soup kitchen in Finland. A 9-year-old missionary kid befriends neighbors in Cyprus. What do they have in common? They are united by mission in the Trans-European Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the *Youth and Adult Mission* magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the *Children's Mission* magazine (bit.ly/childrensmission).

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.

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TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*

Why Is Interpretation Needed?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 24:36–45; 1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Cor. 14:26; Acts 17:16–32; John 12:42, 43.*

Memory Text: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (*Hebrews 11:6, NKJV*).

To read the Bible also means to interpret the Bible. But how do we do that? What principles do we use? How, for instance, do we deal with the different kinds of writing we find there? For example, is the passage we're reading a parable, a prophetic-symbolic dream, or a historical narrative? The decision of such an important question of the context of Scripture involves an act of interpretation itself.

At times, some people use the Bible as a divine oracle: simply opening the Bible randomly to seek a Bible verse that they hope will provide guidance. But randomly linking Bible passages as one finds them can lead to very strange and wrong conclusions.

For instance, when a husband left his wife for another woman, the wife got great assurance when she found the following text: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman” (*Gen. 3:15, NKJV*). She was convinced, based on that verse, that her husband's affair would not last!

Any text without a context quickly becomes a pretext for one's own agenda and ideas. Hence, there is a great need for us not just to read the Bible but to interpret it correctly.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.

Presuppositions

Read Luke 24:36–45. What prevented the disciples, who were very familiar with Scripture, from seeing the true meaning of the Word of God, even when events predicted within it had unfolded before them?

No one comes to the text of Scripture with a blank mind. Every reader, every student of Scripture, comes to the Bible with a particular history and personal experience that inevitably impacts the process of interpretation. Even the disciples had their own particular ideas of who the Messiah was and what He was supposed to do, based on the expectations of their times. Their strong convictions prohibited a clearer understanding of the biblical text, which helps explain why they so often misunderstood Jesus and the events surrounding His life, death, and resurrection.

We all hold a number of beliefs about this world, about ultimate reality, about God, et cetera, that we presuppose or accept—even unwittingly or unconsciously—when we interpret the Bible. No one approaches the biblical text with an empty mind. If, for instance, someone’s worldview categorically rules out any supernatural intervention by God, that person will not read and understand Scripture as a true and reliable report of what God has done in history, but will interpret it very differently from someone who accepts the reality of the supernatural.

Interpreters of the Bible cannot completely divest themselves from their own past, their experiences, resident ideas, and preconceived notions and opinions. Total neutrality, or absolute objectivity, cannot be achieved. Bible study and theological reflection always happen against the background of presuppositions about the nature of the world and the nature of God.

But the good news is that the Holy Spirit can open up and correct our limited perspectives and presuppositions when we read the words of Scripture with an open mind and honest heart. The Bible repeatedly affirms that people with vastly different backgrounds were able to understand the Word of God and that the Holy Spirit leads us “into all truth” (*John 16:13*).

What are some of your own presuppositions regarding the world? In what ways can you surrender all of them to the Word of God so that the Word itself can reshape your ideas to be more in harmony with the reality that the Bible teaches?

Translation and Interpretation

The Bible was written in very ancient languages: the Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew, with a few passages in Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. The majority of the world population today does not speak and read those ancient languages. Hence, the Bible has to be translated into different modern languages.

But, as any good translator knows, every translation always involves some kind of interpretation. Some words in one language do not have an exact equivalent in another. The art and skill of carefully translating and then interpreting texts is called “hermeneutics.”

Read 1 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Corinthians 14:26, John 1:41, John 9:7, Acts 9:36, and Luke 24:27. In all the above passages, we see the idea of interpretation and translation. In Luke 24:27 even Jesus had to explain the meaning of Scripture to the disciples. What does this tell us about the importance of interpretation?

The Greek word *hermeneuo*, from which we have the word *hermeneutics* (biblical interpretation), is derived from the Greek god Hermes. Hermes was considered to be an emissary and messenger of the gods, and as such was responsible for, among other things, translating divine messages for the people.

The crucial point for us in regard to hermeneutics is that unless we read the original languages, our only access to the texts is through translations. Fortunately, many translations do a good job of conveying the essential meaning. We do not need to know the original language to be able to understand the crucial truths revealed in Scripture, even if having that linguistic knowledge could be beneficial. Yet, even with a good translation, a proper interpretation of the texts is important, as well, as we saw in Luke 24:27. That’s the key purpose of hermeneutics: to convey accurately the meaning of Bible texts and to help us know how to apply properly the text’s teaching to our lives now. As the text in Luke above shows, Jesus did this for His followers. Imagine what it must have been like having Jesus Himself interpret Bible passages for you!

Many people have access to various translations, but many don’t. Whatever translations you have to work with, why is it important to study the Word prayerfully and seek to obey its teachings?

The Bible and Culture

Read Acts 17:16–32. In Acts 17, Paul tried to deliver the gospel message in a new context: the philosophy of Greek culture. How do different cultural backgrounds impact how we evaluate the importance of various ideas?

A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is helpful for understanding some biblical passages. “For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore, the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, for example, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.”—“Methods of Bible Study,” section 4.P. at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.

Culture also raises some important hermeneutical questions. Is the Bible culturally conditioned, and thus only relative to that culture in what it asserts? Or does the divine message given in a particular culture transcend this particular culture and speak to all human beings? What happens if one’s own cultural experience becomes the basis and litmus test for our interpretation of Scripture?

In Acts 17:26, the apostle Paul gives an interesting perspective on reality that is often overlooked when people read this text. He states that God made us all from one blood. While we are culturally very diverse, biblically speaking there is a common bond that unites all people, despite their cultural differences, and that’s because God is the Creator of all humanity. Our sinfulness and our need of salvation is not limited to one culture. We all need the salvation offered to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Though God spoke to specific generations, He saw to it that future generations reading the Word of God would understand that those truths go beyond the local and limited circumstances during which the Bible texts were written.

As a parallel, think about algebra, which was first invented in the ninth century A.D. in Baghdad. Does this mean, then, that the truths and principles of this branch of mathematics are limited only to that time and place? Of course not.

The same principle applies to the truths of God’s Word. Though the Bible was written a long time ago in cultures very different from ours today, the truths it contains are as relevant to us now as they were to whom they were first addressed.

Our Sinful and Fallen Nature

Read John 9:39–41 and John 12:42, 43. What hindered the people in these passages from accepting the truth of the biblical message? What words of warning and caution can we take away from these incidents for ourselves?

It's easy to look back with scorn at the religious leaders who rejected Jesus despite such powerful evidence. Yet, we need to be careful ourselves that we don't foster a similar attitude when it comes to His Word.

There is no question that sin has radically altered, ruptured, and fractured our relationship with God. Sin affects all of our human existence. It also affects our ability to interpret Scripture. It is not just that our human thought processes are easily employed for sinful ends, but our minds and thoughts have become corrupted by sin and, therefore, become closed to God's truth. The following characteristics of this corruption can be detected in our thinking: pride, self-deception, doubt, distance, and disobedience.

A prideful person elevates himself or herself over God and His Word. This is because pride leads the interpreter to overemphasize human reason as the final arbiter of truth, even truths found in the Bible. This attitude diminishes the divine authority of Scripture.

Some people tend to listen only to those ideas that are attractive to them, even if they are in contradiction to God's revealed will. God has warned us about the danger of self-deception (*Rev. 3:17*). Sin also fosters doubt, in which we waver and are inclined not to believe God's Word. When one starts with doubt, the interpretation of the biblical text will never lead to certainty. Instead, the doubting person quickly elevates himself to a position where he judges what is and is not acceptable in the Bible, which is very dangerous ground to be standing on.

Instead, we should approach the Bible in faith and submission, and not with an attitude of criticism and doubt. Pride, self-deception, and doubt lead to an attitude of distance toward God and the Bible that surely will lead to disobedience, that is, an unwillingness to follow God's revealed will.

Have you ever found yourself fighting against conviction from what you have read in the Bible—that is, it clearly directed you to do one thing, but you wanted to do another? What happened, and what did you learn from your experience?

Why Interpretation Is Important

Read Nehemiah 8:1–3, 8. Why is a clear understanding of Scripture so important for us, not only as individuals but as a church?

The most important question in the Bible is the question of salvation and how we are saved. After all, what else matters in the long run? What good is it, as Jesus Himself told us, if we gain all that the world offers and lose our own souls (*Matt. 16:26*)?

But to know what the Bible teaches about salvation depends very much on interpretation. If we approach and interpret the Bible wrongly, we will likely come to false conclusions, not just in the understanding of salvation but in everything else that the Bible teaches. In fact, even in the time of the apostles, theological error had already crept into the church, no doubt buttressed by false interpretations of Scripture.

Read 2 Peter 3:15, 16. What does this tell us about how important a correct reading of Scripture is?

Indeed, if we are a people of the Book, who want to live by the Bible and the Bible alone—and we do not have other authoritative sources such as tradition, creeds, or the teaching authority of the church to interpret the Bible for us—then the issue of a correct hermeneutic of the Bible is so important because we have only the Bible to tell us what we shall believe and how we shall live.

The issue of the interpretation of Scripture is vital to the theological and missiological health of the church. Without a correct interpretation of the Bible, there can be no unity of doctrine and teaching, and thus no unity of the church and our mission. A bad and distorted theology inevitably leads to a deficient and distorted mission. After all, if we have a message to give to the world but are confused about the meaning of the message, how efficiently will we be able to present that message to those who need to hear it?

Read the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12. What are the theological issues here, and why is a correct understanding of them so important to our mission?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “What to Do With Doubt,” pp. 105–113, in *Steps to Christ*, and from the document “Methods of Bible Study,” section 1 (Preamble), section 2 (Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture), and section 3 (Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture). “Methods of Bible Study” can be found at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.

“In your study of the word, lay at the door of investigation your preconceived opinions and your hereditary and cultivated ideas. You will never reach the truth if you study the Scriptures to vindicate your own ideas. Leave these at the door, and with a contrite heart go in to hear what the Lord has to say to you. As the humble seeker for truth sits at Christ’s feet, and learns of Him, the word gives him understanding. To those who are too wise in their own conceit to study the Bible, Christ says, You must become meek and lowly in heart if you desire to become wise unto salvation.

“Do not read the word in the light of former opinions; but, with a mind free from prejudice, search it carefully and prayerfully. If, as you read, conviction comes, and you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the word, do not try to make the word fit these opinions. Make your opinions fit the word. Do not allow what you have believed or practiced in the past to control your understanding. Open the eyes of your mind to behold wondrous things out of the law. Find out what is written, and then plant your feet on the eternal Rock.” —Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 260.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How do our worldview, our education, and our culture influence our interpretation of Scripture? Why is it so important for us to be aware of the outside influences that we inevitably bring to our interpretation of the Bible?
- ❷ We all agree that we are sinful and negatively impacted by sin. In what ways does sin affect how we read the Bible? That is, what does sin do to us that could cause us to misinterpret the Word of God? For example, how might a desire to do something condemned in the Bible cause us to read the Bible in a skewed way? In what other ways does sin filter how we interpret the Bible?
- ❸ How can a better understanding of the biblical times and culture help us better understand some passages of Scripture? Give some examples.

Losing Four Sons in Poland

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

God blessed Wiesława Winiarska with four sons in Lodz, Poland.

Then her son Grzegorz died in a freak accident when he was 26. He had taken up running and, while jogging near railroad tracks, was sucked onto the tracks by the wind of a fast-passing train.

Her son Jacek committed suicide at 28. He struggled with life and hanged himself.

Slawek was 39 when he was beaten badly in a street mugging. He died in the hospital.

Her last son, Jarosław, was diagnosed with a brain tumor when he was 16. After multiple operations, he died at 33.

Winiarska has no sons to turn to for help in her old age. At 68, she is in failing health. She has diabetes and has suffered two strokes. She has severe back problems and walks with a cane. She has lost most of her sight and expects to go blind.

“My life hasn’t been a bed of roses,” she said. “Even so, I can say that I am happy. In fact, I have never been as happy as I am now.”

Several years ago, a young medical student, Tomasz Karauda, knocked on her house door with a free copy of *Signs of the Times* magazine. After that, he visited often to talk and offer encouragement. He helped her travel to the hospice to visit her dying son Jarosław, and he comforted her the day that he died.

“Tomek was the first person in my life who helped me,” Winiarska said. “He showed me God.”

After she lost her last son, she gave her heart to Jesus.

“I feel like Job,” she said. “I have received so much, and I have lost so much as well. But God has given me a second life, just like Job.”

Winiarska loves Psalm 23:4, which reads, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (NKJV).



WINIARSKA, pictured, also loves to share her life story with Adventist congregations. Young people usually respond with tears. She tells them that she would never want anyone to suffer an ordeal like hers.

“God’s love keeps me alive,” she said. “My new life began with baptism. Without God, I don’t know what would have happened to me.”

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2017 that helped build a television studio for Hope Channel in Poland, broadcasting the gospel to the Polish-speaking world.

Key Texts: *Heb. 11:6; Luke 24:44, 45; 1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Cor. 14:26; John 1:41; John 9:7; Acts 9:36; Luke 24:27; Acts 17:22–26; John 9:39–41; John 12:42, 43; Neh. 8:1–3, 8.*

Part I: Overview

Sometimes people say that they take the Bible just as it reads, without any need for interpretation. While it is laudable to take the Bible seriously and to be willing to follow what it commands us to do, no one approaches the Bible with a blank mind. We all are influenced in our thinking and understanding by our education, family, the culture we grew up in, and by our experience. We all have some presuppositions with which we approach the text. The reading and study of the biblical text inevitably involves some interpretation. The Bible was written in languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic) that many of us did not grow up with or are only rudimentarily acquainted with. And as any translator knows, every translation into another language involves some form of interpretation. You must know a language really well in order to understand some of its subtleties or when irony is at work. Furthermore, our thinking is darkened by sin and thus not neutral when it comes to spiritual things. The very fact that different churches and denominations exist, even though they all claim to live by the Bible, demonstrates that some form of interpretation is at work in all of us. Yet, we study the same Book and can reach conclusions that unite us, despite all of the above differences. Interpretation is essential to understanding, and this week we will study some methods of interpretation that will guide our Bible study.

Part II: Commentary

The meaning of a sentence is not determined just by the individual words that are used but by the context in which those words are employed. If we do not adequately take into consideration the immediate and wider literary context of a statement and how it uses the words in this circumstance, we quickly will come to wrong conclusions. Similarly, we need to take into consideration the historical background of what is written. It helps us to situate the text. Any text without a context quickly becomes a pretext for one's own opinion. If we ignore the context, we will soon read something

into the text that the writer actually did not intend to convey. We call this *eiseesis*. But rather than reading something into the text that is not there, we should do a thorough *exegesis*. That is, we should read out of the text that which the text actually states. Seventh-day Adventists want to follow nothing but the Bible. We do not have a pope or a teaching tradition that determines the definite meaning of Scripture. Thus, a careful and sound interpretation of the Bible is crucial for our theology and mission. It shapes our theological identity and beliefs.

Presuppositions and Worldviews

Every person holds a number of beliefs that we consciously or unconsciously presuppose. We assume them to be true, even though we cannot absolutely prove them. These most basic convictions about the world and our values are described in what is called worldview. Our worldview determines what is important for us and what is not. It filters our perception and interpretation of reality and provides a model of the world that guides us to live in the world. Our worldview encompasses our understanding of God, of human nature, of morality and truth. A worldview is made up of beliefs and answers to questions in these areas. Our worldview is influenced by our parents, our education, our peers, our experiences, the media, culture, and religion. We use our worldview every day and perceive and interpret reality through it. It influences our thinking and our actions and behavior.

Think

Think about different aspects in which our worldview impacts our thinking and behavior. Share with the members of the class the challenges that arise when different worldviews collide.

As long as we remain teachable, our worldview develops. When learning and growing radically alters many of our core beliefs, or when we have a conversion experience, our worldview can change. This change usually takes place when the previous worldview has been shown to be untruthful. After such a change, the person will continue to make adjustments and will try to bring other beliefs in line with the rest of his or her core beliefs. A conversion to Jesus does not automatically wipe out years of previous education. But it does involve a change from one worldview to another and a harmonizing of all one's beliefs with the Bible.

Think

Read Luke 24:36–49. How did the experience of the risen Christ and His explanation of Scripture change His disciples' view of reality? Share how your conversion experience has impacted your understanding of the Bible. If we only gradually bring all of our previous beliefs

into harmony with Scripture, what does that tell us about how we should deal with others who are growing in their understanding?

Translation and Interpretation

If you want to interpret the Bible correctly, it is helpful to study the Bible in the original languages in which it was written. If that is not possible, use a translation that is following the original languages closely. Such a formal translation emphasizes word-for-word equivalency in the translation process and gives a more exact and literal rendering of the biblical languages. When we study and compare how certain words are actually used in various contexts by the Bible writers, the Bible itself can reveal its meaning. While such a formal translation makes an excellent study Bible, its readings are more wooden and stilted. In contrast to formal translations, there are dynamic translations that emphasize meaning-for-meaning instead of word-for-word equivalence. Here the translation is restructured into idiomatic usage that represents the equivalent thought or meaning in our language. While such translations are very readable, the interpretation may be misleading or erroneous. Finally, there are paraphrase translations. They are far freer with the original languages than are dynamic translations. Because a paraphrase is more interpretation than translation, it is not well suited for serious Bible study.

Think

If different Bible translations are available in your language, show them in your Sabbath School group and give examples of the different translations of a Bible passage. Do it in such a way that listeners are strengthened in their faith and encouraged to study the Bible more seriously for themselves. Recommend a trusted Bible translation in your language for Bible study.

Some denominations issue their own authorized Bible translation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not done so but uses established translations that are available through Bible Societies. Some Adventists have worked with Bible Societies to help make the Bible available to those who don't have one and have made valuable contributions for various Bible translations. Think about ways you can help in the promotion, distribution, and study of the Bible.

The Bible and Culture

A knowledge of Near Eastern culture can be helpful for understanding some biblical passages. Read the passage in "Methods of Bible Study," section 4.8.P. for some illustrations at www.adventistbiblicalresearch

.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study. Today critical scholars maintain that the Bible is culturally conditioned (i.e., it reflects the culture in which it originated) and thus is restricted in its authority because it is limited to a certain cultural setting, they say. While the Bible indeed was written in a particular culture, “the biblical writers insist that the theological message of Scripture is not culture-bound, applicable for only a certain people and a certain time, but permanent and universally applicable.”—Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 85. Jesus was born in a particular culture, and yet, He was not just the Savior for the people in His time. He *is* the Savior of the world. His coming into a particular culture does not make Him culturally relative but gives Him a significance that transcends every culture.

Think

Some people just focus on those things that differ from culture to culture and thereby quickly lose sight of the commonalities that exist in all human beings across cultures. What basic aspects of human existence and human desires are present in all cultures? How does God’s spiritual answer to these aspects transcend any particular culture and speak to all human beings? How can you help to make the Bible’s message applicable to the people in your culture? Where can culture become a hinderance for the acceptance of the Bible’s message?

Our Sinful, Fallen Nature and Biblical Interpretation

Besides all of the above-mentioned aspects that show why interpretation is necessary, there is another factor that is often overlooked. It has to do with the consequences of our sinful, fallen nature. Read Ephesians 4:17, 18 and reflect on what Paul writes there. Here Paul describes some consequences that have arisen because of the blindness of our hearts and the futility of our minds. Sometimes even our understanding and interpretation of Scripture is tainted and dimmed because of our sin. Sometimes we do not follow the things of the Bible because we fear the pressure of our peers or the scorn of our relatives and friends. That is why we need the help of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and to make us willing to follow what we have discovered.

Part III: Life Application

A person has heard the biblical truth. The reading of Scripture has provided

a new perspective that God is real and alive and that living the Bible's message is worthwhile. However, when some prayers are not answered as hoped for and the health of a child is in jeopardy, this person resorts to the traditional sources of healing that are customary in his or her culture. These traditional sources of healing are mediated through powerful witch doctors in the community.

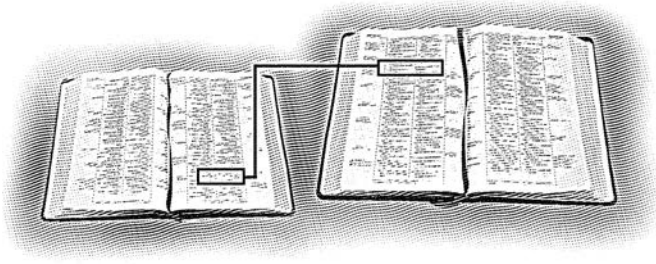
1. **Think about similar tendencies and temptations that you face when your biblical faith is challenged. In what areas are you tempted to trust your received education or your parental upbringing or your experience more than the truth of the Bible?**

2. **Some people who are trained in Western philosophy and critical thinking believe that there is no supernatural being that can intervene in history or do miracles. Their closed worldview prevents them from accepting many supernatural stories in the Bible as real. Where does your worldview influence your interpretation of Scripture?**

3. **A person who is new in the faith wants to study the Bible more thoroughly. What Bible translation could you recommend for this task?**

4. **Why is faith important for a proper understanding of Scripture? What is the role of faith in the process of interpretation?**

Language, Text, *and* Context



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 32:46, 47; 1 Kings 3:6; Num. 6:24–26; Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 2:15–23; Gen. 15:1–5.*

Memory Text: “Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you” (*Deuteronomy 31:26, NKJV*).

More than 6,000 languages are spoken among the world's billions. The complete Bible has been translated into more than 600 languages, with the New Testament or some portions translated into more than 2,500 other languages, as well. That's a lot of languages, for sure. But at the same time, it is still less than half of the known languages of the world.

An estimated 1.5 billion people do not have the full Bible translated into their first language. While there is still much work to be done, the efforts of Bible societies have ensured that six billion people can read Scripture.

And what a blessing to be among those who do have the Bible in their own language! We often take it for granted, forgetting that not only do many not have the Bible but also that for centuries in Europe, the Bible was purposely kept away from the masses. Thanks to the printing press and the Reformation, that is no longer the case. Those of us who do indeed have the Bible continue to look at how we can, filled with the Spirit, learn to study the Word and come to know the Lord revealed in its pages.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 16.

Understanding the Scriptures

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. For what purpose was the Bible given to us?

The Bible was written as a witness to God’s work in history, His plan for redeeming the fallen race of humanity, and to instruct us in all ways of righteousness. The Lord chose to do this in human language, making His thoughts and ideas visible through human words. In redeeming Israel from Egypt, God chose a specific nation to convey His message to all peoples. He allowed that nation to communicate His Word through their language, Hebrew (and a few portions in Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew).

The rise of Greek culture brought a new opportunity, allowing the New Testament to be communicated through the universal language of Greek, which was widely spoken in that part of the world at that time. (In fact, there was even a Greek translation of the Old Testament, as well.) This “universal” language enabled the apostles and early church to spread the message far and wide with new missionary zeal after the death of Christ. Later, the apostle John “bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw” (*Rev. 1:2, NKJV*). In this way, the Bible indicates the continuity of this inspired “witness” and “testimony” from the first writer of Scripture to the last.

Read Deuteronomy 32:46, 47. Why was it so important for the children of Israel to obey “all the words of this law” (*Deut. 32:46*), the Torah, or “instruction”? How does God’s Word “prolong” our days? What might that mean in our context today?

Some people not only have the Bible translated into their native language but even have various versions of it in their own language. Others might have only one version, if even that. But regardless of what you have, the key point is to cherish it as the Word of God and, most important, to obey what it teaches.

Why is it never “a futile thing” (*Deut. 32:47, NKJV*) to obey the Word of God and to teach it to your children, as well?

Words and Their Meanings

In every language there are words that are so rich and deep in meaning that they are difficult to translate adequately with a single word into another language. Such words require a wide study of their usage in the Bible to understand the breadth of meaning.

Read 1 Kings 3:6, Psalm 57:3, Psalm 66:20, Psalm 143:8, and Micah 7:20. How do God’s mercy and kindness extend toward His created beings?

The Hebrew word *chesed* (mercy) is one of the richest and most profound words in the Old Testament. It describes God’s love, loving-kindness, mercy, and covenant attitude toward His people. In these few passages, we have seen Him show “ ‘great mercy [*chesed*] to Your servant David . . . ; You have continued this great kindness [*chesed*] for him’ ” (1 Kings 3:6, NKJV). He “shall send forth His mercy [*chesed*] and His truth” (Ps. 57:3, NKJV). Concerning Israel, He will “give truth to Jacob and mercy [*chesed*] to Abraham” (Mic. 7:20, NKJV). Entire books have been written on the word *chesed*, trying to capture the depth of God’s mercy and love toward us.

Read Numbers 6:24–26, Job 3:26, Psalm 29:11, Isaiah 9:6, and Isaiah 32:17. In these passages, what is the “peace” or *shalom* talked about in them?

The Hebrew word *shalom* is often translated as “peace.” But the meaning of the word is much deeper and broader than this. It can be translated as “wholeness, completeness, and well-being.” God’s blessing and graciousness keep us in a state of *shalom*, which is a gift from God (Num. 6:24–26). By contrast, Job’s experience of trouble produces a situation where he is “ ‘not at ease’ ” (NKJV) nor is he “ ‘quiet,’ ” for he lacks *shalom*. In this hectic world, it is a profound blessing to welcome the Sabbath day with the words *Shabbat shalom*, for our communion with God provides the ultimate peace and wholeness that our lives desire.

In whatever language we speak and read—even without knowing the original meaning of these words—how can we experience the reality of what these words mean to the best of our understanding?

Repetition, Word Patterns, and Meaning

In Hebrew thought, there are a number of ways to express ideas that reinforce meaning and emphasize the importance of concepts. Unlike European languages, Hebrew contains no punctuation marks in the original language, so the language structure developed other ways to communicate such ideas.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Isaiah 6:1–3. What words are repeated in these passages? How are these repeated words enhanced by different concepts that are introduced through repetition?

One of the ways that the Hebrew writer could emphasize a certain attribute of God was by repeating it three times. As the Creation account comes to the apex of God's creative work, the text emphasized the unique importance of created humanity. The term *bara'*, "to create," always has only God as its subject. That is, it is only God that has the power to create without being dependent on preexisting matter. Here the text describes the creation of man: "So God *created* man in His own image; in the image of God He *created* him; male and female He *created* them" (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). Notice the threefold repetition of the word "create." Moses, thus, emphasized that human beings are created by God and that they are created in *His* image, as well. These truths were his emphasis.

In Isaiah's vision and call, the seraphim repeat the words "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (*Isa. 6:3*). The emphasis is on the holiness of an awesome God whose presence fills the temple. We also see this holiness through the words of Isaiah, as he stands in the presence of the Almighty: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (*Isa. 6:5, NKJV*). Even a prophet like Isaiah, confronted with the holiness and character of God, cringed at his own unworthiness. Thus, even here, long before we have Paul's exposition on human sinfulness and the need of a Savior (*Romans 1–3*), we can see the Bible giving expression to the fallen nature of humanity, even in a "good" person such as Isaiah.

In Daniel 3, we have a repetition (with variations) of the phrase "the image which Nebuchadnezzar set up" (*Dan. 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18, NKJV*). This phrase, or variations of it, is repeated 10 times in the chapter to contrast Nebuchadnezzar's action in defiance of the image God revealed to him through Daniel (*Dan. 2:31–45*). The emphasis here is on humanity's seeking to make itself into a god to be worshiped, in contrast to the only true God, the only One worthy of worship.

Texts and Contexts

Words in Scripture always occur in a context. They do not stand by themselves. A word has its immediate context within a sentence, and it is this unit that needs to be understood first. Then there is the wider context of the overall unit in which the sentence occurs. This may be a section of writing, a chapter, or a series of chapters. It is essential to understand as well as possible the context of words and sentences in order not to arrive at erroneous conclusions.

Compare Genesis 1:27 with Genesis 2:7. Then read Genesis 2:15–23. How can we understand from these different passages and contexts the definition of *adam*, the Hebrew word for “man”?

We have already seen that the repetition of the term *bara’* in Genesis 1:27 indicates an emphasis on the creation of man. Now we see that man is defined within the context of this verse as “male and female.” This means that the Hebrew term *adam* is to be understood *in this passage* as a reference generically to humanity.

However, in Genesis 2:7 the same term *adam* is used to refer to the forming of Adam out of the dust of the “ground” (in Hebrew *adamah*—notice the play on words). Here only the male, Adam, is referred to, for Eve is not created until later and in an entirely different manner. Thus, in each passage, even within the context of two chapters, we see a differentiation between the definition of *adam* as “humanity” (*Gen. 1:27*) and the man Adam (*Gen. 2:7*). That Adam is a person is later affirmed in the genealogies (*Gen. 5:1–5, 1 Chron. 1:1, Luke 3:38*) and in reference to Jesus, who becomes the “second Adam” (*Rom. 5:12–14*).

Just as the word *Adam* occurs in a specific text, so the context of the creation of Adam and Eve is found in the larger Creation account as seen in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. This is what is meant by a larger unit. The unit informs the interpreter of additional themes, ideas, and developments. Genesis 2:4–25 has sometimes been called the second Creation account, but in fact there is only a difference in emphasis (see next week). In both accounts, though, we are shown the definitive origins of humanity.

As we can see, man and woman—humanity—are the direct creations of God. What does this tell us about how foolish the “wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 1:20) truly is by teaching us that we arose from mere chance?

Books and Their Messages

The largest units in Scripture are books of the Bible. Biblical books were written for different purposes and in different settings. Some served as prophetic messages; others were compilations, such as the Psalms. There are historical books, such as 1 and 2 Kings, and there are letters to various churches, such as those written by Paul and others.

As we seek to understand a book's meaning and message, it is important to begin with authorship and setting. Many books of the Bible are assigned authors. The first five books of the Old Testament are identified as having been authored by Moses (*Josh. 8:31, 32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Kings 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Dan. 9:11–13; Mal. 4:4*). This is confirmed by Jesus (*Mark 12:26; John 5:46, 47; John 7:19*) and the apostles (*Acts 3:22, Rom. 10:5*). In other cases, some biblical authors are not identified. (For example, the authors of the books Esther and Ruth as well as the authors of many of the historical books, such as Samuel and Chronicles, are not identified.)

Read Genesis 15:1–5 and Genesis 22:17, 18. What significance is it to us that Moses wrote the book of Genesis?

Exodus through Deuteronomy were written by Moses after, of course, the Exodus. But because Genesis is foundational as a history of God's acts from Creation to the patriarchal period, it is logical that this book was written before the Exodus.

"As the years rolled on, and he [Moses] wandered with his flocks in solitary places, pondering upon the oppressed condition of his people, he recounted the dealings of God with his fathers and the promises that were the heritage of the chosen nation, and his prayers for Israel ascended by day and by night. Heavenly angels shed their light around him. Here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251.

With the book of Genesis, we are told not only about our origins but about the plan of salvation, or the means by which God will redeem fallen humanity. This plan becomes even more apparent with the covenant that God makes with Abraham, which involves His promise to establish through him a great nation to be made up of " 'descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore' " (*Gen. 22:17, NKJV*).

What other great truths have we been taught through the book of Genesis, truths about which we might otherwise not know? What does this teach us about how important the Word of God is to our faith?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “John Wycliffe,” pp. 79–96; “Luther Before the Diet,” pp. 145–170, in *The Great Controversy*; also read section 4.a.–j. from the document “Methods of Bible Study,” which can be found at the following link: www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.

“In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. . . . Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Regardless of how many translations of the Bible exist in your language, what can you do to make the most of what you have? How can you learn to cherish the Bible as the Word of God and to seek, by faith, to obey what it teaches?
- ❷ Think about the difference between what the Word of God teaches about human origins (that we were created by God on the sixth day of Creation) and what humanity itself, under the name of “science,” teaches, which is that we evolved over billions of years. What should this vast contrast between the two tell us about how important it is to stick to what the Bible teaches, and how far off humanity can get when it veers away from the Word of God and what it plainly teaches?
- ❸ What Bible tools, if any, are available to you that can help you better understand the Bible? And even if you don’t have any extra tools, how can you learn to apply some of the lessons learned this week about how to interpret the Bible?
- ❹ The children of Israel were told to teach their own children the great truths committed to them and to retell the stories about God’s leading in their lives (*Deut. 4:9*). Putting aside the obvious benefit of passing the faith on, what is it about the teaching and the telling of stories about God’s leading in our lives that tends to increase our own faith? That is, why is sharing biblical truth with others beneficial to ourselves, as well?

“I Have Chills!”

By KAMIL METZ

Liz was busy working in her home in Houston, Texas, United States, when suddenly something told her to be still for a moment. Just then, she heard a knock at the door.

When she opened the door, however, she didn't see anyone. David Pano already had left her porch and was swiftly walking to the next house. Seeing his retreating figure, Liz called out to let him know she was there. Pano heard her call and returned to her home.

He smiled and handed her a GLOW tract.

“Is this from a cult?” she asked.

Pano assured her that it was not and that it was just a Christian tract.

“I have chills right now!” Liz exclaimed. “Not too long ago I had a dream. In the dream, I saw two ministers of the gospel coming to my house sharing literature. And I knew that they were not a cult.”

Pano, a minister who works as assistant ministries director at the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Michigan Conference, was thrilled to hear about her dream. The only problem with its fulfillment, he quietly pondered, was that he was there by himself.

Just then, Taylor Hinkle (pictured), his ministry partner on that street, arrived. Hinkle, a chaplain and Bible teacher at Great Lakes Adventist Academy in Michigan, had run out of GLOW tracts on his side of the street, so he had come to Pano to get some more tracts. There were now two ministers of the gospel at her door!

Liz looked at Pano and Hinkle.

“I believe that this is from God,” she said. “In my dream, I saw two ministers at my door bringing hope to me. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is your last chance. I'm coming back soon!’”

“Please pray for me,” she said. “I need Jesus in my life.”

The two young ministers, who were going door to door with other young adults during GYC's annual convention in Houston on December 30, 2016, gladly prayed for her. Liz signed up to take Bible studies with a local church.

God sends His people as ministers of hope into this dark and gloomy world to introduce souls to the Source of hope. Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White wrote, “We are to minister to the despairing, and inspire hope in the hopeless” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 350). Why not choose today to be a minister of hope for Jesus?



TAYLOR HINKLE is pictured. KAMIL METZ is the international director for the GLOW ministry.

Key Texts: Deut. 32:46, 47; 1 Kings 3:6; Num. 6:24–26; Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 2:15–23; Gen. 15:1–5.

Part I: Overview

Words have power. They can rouse a people from the oppression of slavery to a faithful life of deliverance. Joshua urged the people, “ ‘Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:15, NKJV*). Words also can be devastating and be used to destroy and deceive. When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he insinuated doubt: “ ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat of any tree of the garden”? ’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, RSV*). Words can be accusatory and judgmental, and they can be soothing and kind, bringing healing to the soul.

God chose to communicate the history of His creation, the Fall, the plan of Redemption, the promise of restoration, and the Second Coming to the world through prophets and writers. They wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—languages that are often quite different from the ones we learned from childhood. The entire Bible has been translated into at least 636 languages and the New Testament into another 3,223 languages or more so that 95 percent of the earth’s population can read the Word of God. In this week’s lesson, we will be discussing how interpreting the words, phrases, and narratives of Scripture within their original contexts helps us more fully understand God’s message for us today.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

It is important that we understand that meaning derives from the smallest parts of language, the individual word itself, and expands to the context of a sentence, a narrative, and finally a book. The word *dabar* in Hebrew is very rich in meaning, for it can signify a “word,” “thing,” or even “prophecy.” For this reason, it is important to study the larger context of words and how they may be used in the Bible. The Hebrew words *chesed* (mercy) and *shalom* (peace) are examples of the kinds of words that have a wide semantic range and can be understood more deeply if studied from the entire context of Scripture. In other cases, there are biblical teachings (doctrines) or ideas that are best understood by studying a cluster of words with similar meanings that together give a full range of understanding.

One such teaching that benefits from an approach like this is the biblical concept of the remnant.

Illustration

The Seventh-day Adventist Church identifies itself as the remnant church of Bible prophecy. It has been called forth as a movement in this end time to proclaim the three angels' messages with clarity. The remnant church proclaims the Sabbath as the seal that will distinguish a commandment-keeping people who have the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). Their ability to keep the commandments can only come through the merits and power of Christ, as shown by His example to overcome and inherit the crown of life (*John 16:32, 33; 1 John 4:4; 1 John 5:4, 5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; Rev. 3:5, 12, 21*). This claim to be the remnant, however, seems rather exclusivist and arrogant in our modern setting. How can we know that God has a remnant?

The remnant idea is found throughout Scripture. One of the words for “remnant” is *sh'e'ār*, which in its various derivatives occurs 226 times in the Old Testament. The noun form *sh'e'ār* can designate the “remnant” of Israel (*Isa. 10:20*) or “his people” (*Isa. 11:11, 16; Isa. 28:5*). In this case, the text indicates this is a remnant chosen by God. Isaiah 4:2–6 and Isaiah 6:13 further describe a remnant that has gone through a purifying fire of divine judgment and comes out as a holy people. Other Hebrew words that describe the remnant also can be studied and include terms such as *pālat*, *mālat*, *yāthar*, *sārid*, and *'aḥarīt*. These terms must be studied in their contexts too. Anyone can do this with a good concordance. A study of this type reveals that the Bible describes the concept of a “remnant” in several ways: (1) The “historical remnant” are like those in Isaiah 1:4–9 who are the survivors of a catastrophe. (2) The “faithful remnant” are those who remain faithful to God and who carry all of the promises of God’s people. (3) Finally, the “eschatological remnant” are those who go through the tribulations of the end time and emerge victorious on the great day of the Lord to receive His kingdom. In Revelation, the dragon is enraged at the woman and makes war with the “remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Rev. 12:17*). The rich nature of each of these terms in their contexts add to the others until, within the whole context of the Bible, the concept emerges with clarity, and the student begins to understand the entirety of the idea of “remnant.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1980), pp. 113–116.

Illustration

Two discoveries or breakthroughs in recent times have helped us understand the origin of the Bible. The Egyptian language, written in hiero-

glyphics, was deciphered in 1822 by Jean Champollion. This discovery unlocked the long-lost secrets of one of the oldest civilizations and allowed us to compare the ancient Egyptian texts with the text of the Bible. Several interesting contributions emerged over time: (1) Many of the geographical places mentioned in the Bible were recorded by the Egyptians who regularly campaigned into, and traded with, Canaan. A great deal of correspondence and accuracy was found between the names and locations mentioned in Egypt and those mentioned in the Bible. (2) There were numerous Egyptian loanwords found particularly in the first five books of the Pentateuch. Scholars have documented a number of loanwords, such as *tevah*, the word for “ark,” which derives from the Egyptian word meaning “box,” “chest,” or “coffer.” This word is used of both Noah’s ark and the ark in which Moses was placed as a baby. The name for Egypt used in the Bible is *Mitzraim*. This name is a dual word in Hebrew that comes from Egyptian *msr*, the word for Egypt. The dual ending indicates the “two lands” of Upper and Lower Egypt. Egyptian idioms also are used. The phrase “outstretched arm,” used to describe the protection of God, is a common Egyptian expression of strength. Egyptian titles, as well as manners and customs of speech, were used by the author. Finally, there are a number of Egyptian personal names that appear. All of these discoveries point to the conclusion that the first books of the Bible were written during the Exodus generation and that the author was intimately acquainted with Egypt, its customs, and history. Moses certainly would have had the education and background necessary to write the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy, as the Bible often affirms.

Another discovery relates to the original writing of Scripture by Moses. The invention of the alphabet, which was derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs, took place in the Sinai Peninsula about a century before the Exodus. This major breakthrough in communication simplified writing and made literacy possible for the common people. Moses, then, could have written not in complicated Egyptian hieroglyphs but in the simplified proto-Canaanite alphabet that would eventually develop into Hebrew. God’s timing is always perfect for placing His message in the hands of His people.

Scripture

Other concepts and words in the Bible are entirely unique. In the Creation account more emphasis is placed on the creation of humanity than on any other element or creature. Humanity is placed at the apex of Creation. It is the work of the triune Godhead as They proclaim Their intention, “Let us make man in our image” (*Gen. 1:26*). This verse’s unique threefold

emphasis on the verb *bara*’, “to create,” reiterates God’s intention to create man and woman uniquely in His image and in His likeness. The immediate context of Genesis 1 indicates that both ‘*Elohim*, “God,” in His majestic plurality and *ruach Elohim*, “the Spirit of God,” are involved in the creative work (*Gen. 1:1, 2*). John 1:1–3 makes it clear that Jesus was the agent of Creation, for “ ‘He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made’ ” (*NKJV*). When allowing the fullness of Scripture to interpret itself, we learn that the “us” in Genesis 1:26 included all three members of the Godhead. Humanity, in this way, was created *in* relationship *for* relationship in order that they might be “fruitful and multiply; fill the earth” (*Gen. 1:28, NKJV*). They were created to commune with God on the Sabbath that He created for them (*Gen. 2:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11*). That God might dwell among His people continues to be His purpose for us through eternity.

Part III: Life Application

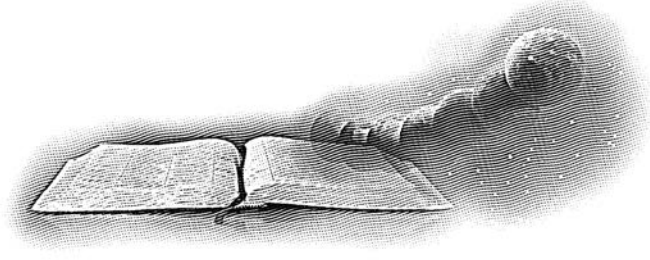
So, how can we study the Bible deeply without understanding the original biblical languages? We have tools such as Strong’s or Young’s concordances available now through the internet, and physically, that are more accessible today than ever before. We can study how words are used within sentences, within books, and throughout Scripture. The founders of our church did not have all of the tools available that we have today. They had their Bibles and concordances. By carefully following Protestant principles of biblical interpretation and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they were able to know God’s plan of salvation and the truths taught by the prophets and by Jesus. Here are some discussion questions you can use to lead your group:

- 1. How does the knowledge that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible help us to accept Scripture as a reliable source today? Remind your class again of the words of admonition that Moses gave to the people at the time of his death (*Deut. 32:46, 47*). Discuss how we can practice this principle in our families.**

2. What does it mean to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture? Why is it important to understand the meaning of what Scripture itself says rather than importing our own ideas into Scripture?

3. How does the understanding of a word and its depth of meaning help us see God's purpose for our lives? What kind of power do certain words have in the Old Testament (for example: *justice*, *mercy*, or *hope*)? How do these words impact our knowledge of God's character?

Creation: Genesis *as* Foundation—Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1–3, Gen. 1:3–5, Exod. 20:8–11, Rev. 14:7, Matt. 19:3–6, Rom. 5:12.*

Memory Text: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (*John 1:1–4, NKJV*).

The first chapters of Genesis are foundational for the rest of Scripture. The major teachings or doctrines of the Bible have their source in these chapters. Here we find the nature of the Godhead working in harmony as the Father, Son (*John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:1, 2*), and the Spirit (*Gen. 1:2*) to create the world and all that is in it, culminating in humanity (*Gen. 1:26–28*). Genesis also introduces us to the Sabbath (*Gen. 2:1–3*), the origin of evil (*Genesis 3*), the Messiah and the plan of redemption (*Gen. 3:15*), the worldwide, universal flood (*Genesis 6–9*), the covenant (*Gen. 1:28; Gen. 2:2, 3, 15–17; Gen. 9:9–17; Genesis 15*), the dispersal of languages and people (*Genesis 10, Genesis 11*), and the genealogies that provide the framework for biblical chronology from Creation to Abraham (*Genesis 5, Genesis 11*). Finally, the power of God's spoken Word (*Gen. 1:3, 2 Tim. 3:16, John 17:17*), the nature of humanity (*Gen. 1:26–28*), God's character (*Matt. 10:29, 30*), marriage between a man and a woman (*Gen. 1:27, 28; Gen. 2:18, 21–25*), stewardship of the earth and its resources (*Gen. 1:26; Gen. 2:15, 19*), and the promised hope of a new creation (*Isa. 65:17, Isa. 66:22, Rev. 21:1*) are all based on these first chapters, which will be our study this week and next.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 23.

“In the Beginning . . .”

Read Genesis 1:1. What deep truths are revealed here?

The Bible opens with the most sublime and profound words, words that are simple but that simultaneously contain a measureless depth when carefully studied. In fact, the greatest questions of philosophy regarding who we are, why we are here, and how we got here are answered by the first sentence of the Bible.

We exist because God created us at a definite time in the past. We did not evolve out of nothing; nor did we come into existence by chance, for no ultimate purpose, and with no planned direction, as much of the contemporary scientific model of origins now teaches. Darwinian evolution is contradictory to Scripture in every way, and attempts by some to harmonize it with the Bible make Christians look silly.

We also were created by God at an absolute point in time: “in the beginning.” This must mean that God existed prior to this beginning. That is, God existed before time was created and expressed in the daily cycle of “evening and morning” and in the months and in the years, all marked by the relationship of the world to the sun and moon. This absolute beginning is echoed and supported by other passages of Scripture, which continually reaffirm the nature and means of God’s creative work (*John 1:1–3*).

Read John 1:1–3 and Hebrews 1:1, 2. Who was the agent of creation? Think about what it means that He also died on the cross.

The Bible teaches that Jesus was the agent of creation. The Bible says that “all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*). Through Jesus “He made the worlds” (*Heb. 1:1, 2, NKJV*). Because all things have their origin in Jesus in the beginning, we can have hope that in the end He will complete what He has begun, because He is the “ ‘Alpha and the Omega,’ ” “ ‘the First and the Last’ ” (*Rev. 1:8, Rev. 22:13, NKJV*).

What difference does it make to know that you were created by God? Imagine if you didn’t believe that. How differently would you view yourself and others, and why?

The Days of Creation

In recent years there has been a trend to view the Creation week as nonliteral, as a metaphor, a parable, or even a myth. This has arisen in the wake of the theory of evolution, which assumes long ages of time to account for the development of life on planet Earth.

What does the Bible teach on this subject? Why are the “days” of Creation in Genesis 1 to be understood as literal, and not figurative, days?

Read Genesis 1:3–5 and Exodus 20:8–11. How is the term “day” used in these contexts?

The Hebrew word *yôm*, or “day,” is used consistently throughout the Creation narrative for a literal day. Nothing in the Genesis Creation narrative indicates that anything other than a literal day was meant, as we understand a single day today. In fact, some scholars who don’t believe the days were literal will, nevertheless, admit that the author’s intention was to depict literal days.

It is interesting that God Himself designates this name for the first unit of time (*Gen. 1:5*). *Yôm*, or day, is defined with the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” (*Gen. 1:5, 8, etc., NASB*). The term is used in the singular, not the plural, meaning a single day.

Thus, the seven days of Creation are to be understood as a complete unit of time, introduced by the cardinal number *’echad* (“one”) followed by ordinal numbers (second, third, fourth, etc.). This pattern indicates a consecutive sequence of days, culminating in the seventh day. There is no indication in the use of terms or in the narrative form itself that there should be any gaps between these days. The seven days of Creation are, indeed, seven days as we delineate days today.

Also, the literal nature of the day is taken for granted when God wrote with His own finger the fourth commandment, indicating that the basis for the seventh-day Sabbath rests on the sequence of a literal seven-day, Creation week.

The Genesis Creation isn’t the only creation in the Bible. There also is the re-creation, at the Second Coming, when God will transform mortality into immortality “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV). If, however, God can do this instantly at the re-creation, why would He use billions of years for the first creation, as theistic evolution teaches?

The Sabbath and Creation

Today the seventh-day Sabbath is heavily under attack in secular society and in religious communities. This fact can be seen in the work schedules of global corporations; in the attempted change of the calendar in many European countries designating Monday as the first day of the week and Sunday as the seventh day; and by the recent papal encyclical on climate change that calls the seventh-day Sabbath “the Jewish Sabbath” and encourages the world to observe a day of rest to alleviate global warming (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* [Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015], pp. 172, 173).

Read Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, Mark 2:27, and Revelation 14:7. **How is the understanding of the Creation week tied to the fourth commandment? How is this tied to the three angels’ messages?**

The Bible says, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done” (*Gen. 2:2, NKJV*). “After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man.” —Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 47. This is why Jesus can say, “ ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, NKJV*). Jesus could make this authoritative statement because He made or created the Sabbath as the eternal sign and seal of God’s covenant with His people. The Sabbath was not for the Hebrew people only, but for all humanity.

Genesis indicates three things that Jesus did after He created the Sabbath day. First, He “rested” (*Gen. 2:2*), giving us a divine example of His desire to rest with us. Second, He “blessed” the seventh day (*Gen. 2:3*). In the Creation narrative, animals are blessed (*Gen. 1:22*), and Adam and Eve are blessed (*Gen. 1:28*), but the only day specifically blessed is the seventh day. Third, God “sanctified it” (*Gen. 2:3*) or “made it holy.”

No other day in the Bible receives these three designations. These three actions are repeated in the fourth commandment, though, when God writes with His own finger and points back to Creation as the foundation for the Sabbath (*Exod. 20:11*).

A comparison of Revelation 14:7 and Exodus 20:11 reveals the Sabbath commandment to be the basis for worshipping the Creator. How does this direct link to the Sabbath tie into last-day events?

Creation and Marriage

The last decade has witnessed enormous changes in the way society and governments define marriage. Many nations of the world have approved same-sex marriages, overturning previous laws that have protected the family structure that comprises at its center one man and one woman. This is an unprecedented development in many respects, and it raises new questions about the institution of marriage, the relationship of church and state, and the sanctity of marriage and the family as defined in Scripture.

Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:18, 21–24. What do these texts teach us about God’s ideal for marriage?

On the sixth day, God comes to the climax of the Creation, the Creation of humanity. It is fascinating that the plural is used for God in Genesis 1:26: “‘Let us make man in our image.’ ” All persons of the triune Godhead in loving relationship with each other now create the divinely instituted human relationship of marriage here on the earth.

“In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV*). Adam declares, “‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh’ ” (*Gen. 2:23, NKJV*), and Adam names her “Woman.” Marriage requires that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24, NKJV*).

Scripture is unequivocal that this relationship is to take place between a man and a woman, who themselves originate from their father and mother, also a man and woman. This concept is further clarified in the instruction given to the earth’s first parents: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it’ ” (*Gen. 1:28, NKJV*). In the fifth commandment, children (offspring) are to honor their father and their mother (*Exod. 20:12*). This interrelationship cannot be fulfilled within anything but a heterosexual partnership.

Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:3–6. What do they teach us about the nature and sanctity of marriage? In light of Jesus’ words, and while never forgetting God’s love for all humanity and that all of us are sinners, how should we take a firm and faithful stand on the biblical principles of marriage?

Creation, the Fall, and the Cross

The Bible provides an unbroken link between the perfect Creation, the Fall, the promised Messiah, and final redemption. These major events become the basis of the theme of salvation history for the human race.

Read Genesis 1:31, Genesis 2:15–17, and Genesis 3:1–7. What happened to God’s perfect Creation?

God declared His creation “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). “The creation was now complete. . . . Eden bloomed on earth. Adam and Eve had free access to the tree of life. No taint of sin or shadow of death marred the fair creation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 47. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden tree, they would surely die (*Gen. 2:15–17*). The serpent began his discourse with a question and then completely contradicted what God had said: “ ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). Satan promised Eve great knowledge and that she would be like God. Obviously, she believed him.

How does Paul confirm God’s statement in Genesis 2:15–17? Read Romans 5:12 and Romans 6:23. How do these teachings relate to theistic evolution?

In Scripture, we can see where later biblical writers confirmed earlier biblical statements and provided additional insights. In Romans 5–8, Paul writes about sin and the beauty of salvation: “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people” (*Rom. 5:12, NIV*). But an evolutionary perspective would have death present for millions of years prior to humanity. This idea has serious implications for the biblical teaching of the origin of sin, Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, and the plan of salvation. If death is not related to sin, then the wages of sin is not death (*Rom. 6:23*), and Christ would have had no reason to die for our sins. Thus, Creation, the Fall, and the Cross are inextricably linked. The first Adam is tied to the last Adam (*1 Cor. 15:45, 47*). A belief in Darwinian evolution, even if some concept of God is inserted into the process, would destroy the very basis of Christianity.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Literal Week,” pp. 111–116, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The cumulative evidence, based on comparative, literary, linguistic and other considerations, converges on every level, leading to the singular conclusion that the designation *yôm*, ‘day,’ in Genesis 1 means consistently a literal 24-hour day.

“The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal ‘day’ than the ones that were chosen.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/EPOCHS’ of Time?” *Origins* 21/1 (1994), pp. 30, 31.

“The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God, become bewildered in their attempts to investigate the relations of science and revelation. The Creator and His works are beyond their comprehension; and because these cannot be explained by natural laws, Bible history is pronounced unreliable.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 258.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at the Ellen G. White quote above. How often, even today, do we see exactly what she wrote, even among professed Christians who, in face of the claims of science, will automatically take the claims of science over the biblical account, which would, as she wrote, imply that biblical history “is unreliable”?
- ② Why is it impossible to take the Bible seriously while accepting theistic evolution? If you know a theistic evolutionist who claims to be a Christian, why not ask him or her to explain the Cross in light of what Paul wrote (*see Romans 5*) about the direct link between Adam’s fall and death and the cross of Jesus? What explanation does he or she give?
- ③ If the Bible is God’s revelation, then are not the believer’s faith and eyes opened to the greater reality as expressed in Scripture? How can Christians then be called “closed-minded” when they are opening their minds to the scriptural truths revealed by an infinite God? In fact, an atheistic, materialistic view of the world is much narrower than is the Christian worldview.
- ④ As believers staying faithful to the Word of God, how can we minister to those who are struggling with questions of sexual identity? Why must we not be those who cast stones, even with people who, like the woman caught in adultery, are guilty of sin?

Delayed Heart Attack

By YIANNAKIS KYRIAZIS

Dreadful abdominal pain awoke me at 5:00 A.M.

Though rested, I felt exhausted and out of breath. I was nearly 60 and not in the best of health, so I went straight to the hospital in Cyprus's capital, Nicosia. A doctor examined me, said everything was fine, and told me to go home.

My wife, Marbie, was by my side. She had been instrumental in helping me to stop smoking five packs of cigarettes a day. She also had led me to Jesus and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She had agreed to marry me only after my life changed, and I was baptized.

Here I was now, just two years into my new faith and marriage, and feeling very unwell.

"I'm not going anywhere," I told the doctor.

I was still in pain and wanted to know why. Seeing my persistence, the doctor agreed to call a cardiologist, who, it was discovered, was off duty.

I waited. One hour passed. Two hours. Then five, seven, eight hours.

Around 1:10 P.M., the pain increased substantially. Struggling to breathe, I stood up to go outside for fresh air. My head began to spin, and darkness came over me.

Someone shouted, "Quick! He's having a heart attack."

At that moment, the cardiologist arrived.

Medical workers rushed me to the emergency room.

When I regained consciousness, I learned that my heart arteries had been badly blocked.

"We did everything that we could," the cardiologist said.

I was hospitalized in the intensive-care unit for three weeks. Once my condition improved, doctors performed open-heart surgery. I was in the operating room for 9 ½ hours. By God's grace, the operation went well, and I am strong and happy again.

Looking back, I believe that the pains that awoke me at 5:00 A.M. were the beginning of a heart attack. I could have died right away. Yet our loving God delayed the heart attack for a full 8 ½ hours until the cardiologist arrived, thus preserving my life.



Today I am 61 and very grateful to God for giving me a new lease on life. I will use the extra years that He has given me to serve Him and others.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia for Kyriazis's congregation and two other congregations.

Key Texts: *Gen. 1:3–5, John 1:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11, Rev. 14:7, Matt. 19:3–6, Rom. 5:12.*

Part I: Overview

Jesus once said, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (*Matt. 7:24, 25, NKJV*). If Christ’s revelation to us, His Word the Bible, is to be the foundation of our lives, what is the foundation on which all Scripture builds? The answer lies in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, in which the major teachings or doctrines have their source.

There we find the foundational teaching of Creation and of God the Creator. Given the importance of this foundation, should we think it is a coincidence, then, that there has been an unprecedented assault in modern times against the biblical teaching of Creation? Is it by chance that the end-time church is commissioned to proclaim Jesus as the Creator, who emphasizes this one characteristic of Himself? In the introduction to the church of Laodicea (the last of the seven churches in Revelation 2, 3), Jesus refers to Himself as “the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (*Rev. 3:14, NKJV*). The three angels’ messages begin with the proclamation of the first angel: “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). During the next two weeks, we will study why the teaching of Creation is foundational for the message and mission of God’s end-time people and how the Creation account should be interpreted.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

Have you ever wondered about your existence? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What meaning is there to life? Who am I? The great philosophers have pondered these questions for millennia. These fundamental questions are at the core of the Creation account and are, in fact, answered in the first two chapters of Genesis. Over the course

of history, these chapters have provided humanity with dignity, meaning, and purpose. They have inspired the greatest minds to explore the world around them and discover the wonders of God's creation.

In the simple opening sentence of the Bible, Genesis 1:1 addresses the deepest of human questions. Before we were created, in the beginning there was God. He designed an ecosystem for us, creating the habitation of earth perfectly for His new creatures in order to sustain life. Our earth is located at a precise distance from the sun—not too far, and not too close. The sun is perfectly sized so as not to produce too much energy to destroy life. There is abundant water on earth and a breathable atmosphere. The moon is just the right size to control the tides. The magnetic field is fine-tuned to keep us from getting fried by the sun. No wonder that after every stage of Creation, God concludes that it is good (*tôv*; *Gen. 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25*), and when it was completed, *tôv mē'ôd*, “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). The designation “good” in Hebrew can include both aesthetic beauty and ethical aspects because the creation originated from God, who is love (*1 John 4:8*).

Illustration

In Psalm 139:14, David recognizes the complexities of the body when he says, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (*NKJV*). Today we know so much more than those in David's day did about the intricacies of the smallest element of the human body—the cell. The human cell is made up of the tiniest of machines that, in order to function, must have all their parts. Like a mousetrap, you take one part away, and the devices cease to function. Each cell contains a person's DNA. A computer is based on binary code of zeros and ones. DNA is made up of a quaternary code (A, C, G, and T), which is far more complex than a binary code. An entire language with grammar and syntax is associated with DNA, with three billion bases. Moreover, this DNA can replicate itself, and it does so within nearly 40 trillion cells in the human body. Each of the 200 types of the cells in the human body has a different function. These are the core building blocks of life, and they work in harmony to carry out the basic functions for a human being to survive. Certainly, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. The complexity and the commonality among all human beings and living creatures point to a single Creator who designed life. But we are not simply machines. We have been given a creative mind, a conscience, and an ability to experience love, hope, and happiness. The conscience of the human mind and the freedom we have to choose and to create are impossible to explain from an evolutionary perspective. How much easier to believe in a Creator who created us in His image and in His likeness (*Gen. 1:27*).

Scripture

After creating the ecosystem for life and filling it with fish, birds, and land animals, the communal Godhead designed humanity as the apex of Creation also to exist in community. “ ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’ . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (*Gen. 1:26, 27, NKJV*). Humanity was to live in communion with God and with each other. God designed that both male and female were to be biologically, physically, and emotionally the counterpart to each other. They were created to complement each other. They were the “perfect fit” for each other so that Adam could exclaim when Eve was later designed from his rib, “ ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ ” (*Gen. 2:23, NKJV*). Thus, Adam names her “woman.” Marriage requires that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24, NKJV*).

The basis for culture and civilization on earth was the husband-and-wife unit and the children that were born from this relationship through procreation. That is why the Bible places so much emphasis on the family unit. This emphasis on the family unit also is highlighted in the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments describe humanity’s relationship to God, culminating in the seventh-day Sabbath, which solidifies the obedience and honor given to God by means of a special relationship from week to week. Notice that after the Sabbath precept the transition to the fifth commandment focuses first and foremost on the family, for here is where God’s character was to be transmitted for future generations: “ ‘Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you’ ” (*Exod. 20:12, NKJV*). A world filled with loving families, who regard God supremely and uphold His character in their lives and raise their children in humble obedience was the original purpose in God’s creation.

Satan’s attempt to destroy God’s purpose at the Fall drove a wedge between God and humanity and then between Adam and Eve. The separation of Eve from Adam provided Satan an opening. In an unguarded moment, Eve curiously approached the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan, by insinuating doubt upon the Word of God, succeeded in distorting and disrupting God’s plan of protection. The immediate results were devastating. After Eve and then Adam ate from the tree, their sense of separation and guilt tore the first couple from their relationship with God. They now sensed

their own nakedness. After God in His love pursues them, they blame each other and God, furthering the division that has now occurred. In the very next chapter, Genesis 4, we see the full result of sin in the murder of a son and brother. Disobedience to God's Word bore its ultimate fruit in the destruction of God's creation.

The insinuating doubt of Satan at the beginning, “ ‘Did God really say . . . ?’ ” (*Gen. 3:1, NIV*) is still with us today through the theory of evolution. God's Word plainly testifies that He spoke the heavens and the earth into existence and that “all things were made through Him [Christ], and without Him nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*). If we doubt God's Word concerning His Creatorship, are we not as surely following a lie as did our first parents in the beginning of earth's history?

Christ came to restore the world and His creation to Himself and to His Father. In declaring that “ ‘before Abraham was, I AM’ ” (*John 8:58, NKJV*), Jesus declared that He was the self-existent God of the universe. The wind and seas obeyed Him because He created them. He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, because “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (*John 1:4, NKJV*). The final re-creation that Christ promises at the Second Coming is possible only if He was truly our Creator at the beginning.

Part III: Life Application

God intended for the family to be the foundational unit of human life. What, then, are the results when the foundation in a building is eroded? How does an erosion of a belief in Creation contribute to the rest of the structure in society? What difference does the theory of evolution make for the meaning of our existence? This week, what testifies of God's purpose in your life?

“Jesus pointed His hearers back to the marriage institution as ordained at creation. . . . Then marriage and the Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity. Then, as the Creator joined the hands of the holy pair in wedlock, saying, A man shall ‘leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one’ (*Genesis 2:24*), He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time. That which the eternal Father Himself had pronounced good was the law of highest blessing and development for man.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 63, 64.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Creation: Genesis *as* Foundation—Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 26:7–10; Genesis 1; Genesis 2; Genesis 5; Genesis 11; 1 Chron. 1:18–27; Matt. 19:4, 5; John 1:1–3.*

Memory Text: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (*Psalms 19:1, NKJV*).

Many great thinkers were inspired by Scripture to explore God's created world; as a result, modern science was born. Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, John Ray, Robert Boyle, and other early great scientists believed that their work revealed even more about the handiwork of God's creation.

After the French Revolution, however, nineteenth-century science began to move from a theistic worldview to one based on naturalism and materialism, often with no place at all for the supernatural. These philosophical ideas were popularized by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Since that time, science has increasingly distanced itself from its biblical foundation, resulting in a radical reinterpretation of the Genesis story.

Does the Bible teach an antiquated, unscientific view of cosmology? Was the biblical account simply borrowed from the surrounding pagan nations? Was the Bible culturally conditioned by its place and time, or does its inspired nature elevate us to a view of origins that is complete in its divine framework?

These are some of the issues we will touch on in this week's lesson.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 30.

A Flat Earth?

It is commonly believed that many in the ancient world thought the earth was flat. Most people, however, for a variety of good reasons, understood that the earth was round. Even to this day, though, some claim that the Bible itself taught that the earth was flat.

Read Revelation 7:1 and Revelation 20:7, 8. What is the context of these verses? More important, do they teach a flat earth?

John, the author of these texts, is writing end-time prophecy describing the four angels of heaven “standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds” (*Rev. 7:1, NASB*). He repeated the word “four” three times to tie the angels to the four compass points.

In short, he’s just using figurative language, as we do today when we say, for example, that “the sun is setting” or that the wind “rose from the east.” To insist on a literal interpretation of these prophetic texts when the context indicates a figurative idea of north, south, east, and west is to take these passages out of context and make them teach something that they are not teaching. After all, when Jesus said, “For out of *the heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (*Matt. 15:19, NKJV; emphasis supplied*), He was not talking about human physiology, or the literal human heart. He was using a figure of speech to make a moral point.

Read Job 26:7–10 and Isaiah 40:21, 22. What do they teach us about the nature of the earth?

In Job 26:7 the earth is depicted as being suspended in space: “ ‘He stretches out the north over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing’ ” (*NASB*). The earth is a “ ‘circle,’ ” or sphere (*Job 26:10, NASB*). Isaiah 40:22 states, “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (*NKJV*).

Put yourself in the position of someone who lived thousands of years ago. What evidence would you have that the earth moved? Or would you find the evidence that it stood still more convincing? Or what evidence would you find that it is flat, or round?

Creation in Ancient Literature

Archaeologists have discovered texts from ancient Egypt and the Near East that contain primeval histories of the Creation and the Flood. This has caused some to wonder whether the Genesis account was borrowed from these cultures or was dependent in some way on them. But is such a thing really the case?

Read Genesis 1:1–2:4, and then read these excerpts from the *Atra-Hasis* Epic: “When the gods instead of man / Did the work, bore the loads, / The gods’ load was too great, / The work too hard, the trouble too much / . . . ‘Let the womb-goddess create offspring, / And let man bear the load of the gods!’ . . . Geshtu-e, a god who had intelligence, / They slaughtered in their assembly. / Nintu mixed clay / With his flesh and blood. . . .”—Stephanie Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 9, 14, 15. What differences can you see?

Although there are similarities between the stories (e.g., the first humans are made of clay), the differences are much more definite.

1. In *Atra-Hasis* man works for the gods so that the gods can rest. In Genesis, God creates the earth and everything in it *for* humans as the apex of Creation, and then He rests with them. In Genesis, humans also are placed in a garden and invited to commune with God and care for His creation—a concept not found in *Atra-Hasis*.

2. In *Atra-Hasis*, a minor god is killed and his blood is mixed with clay to form seven males and females. In Genesis, first Adam is “formed” intimately by God, who breathes life into him, and woman is “made” later to be his “‘helper’ ” (NKJV). God didn’t create Adam and Eve from the blood of a slain god.

3. There is no sign of conflict or violence in the Genesis account, as found in the *Atra-Hasis* story.

The biblical account is sublime in depicting an omnipotent God who provides humanity with dignified purpose in a perfect world. This radical difference has caused scholars to conclude that, in the end, these are very different creation accounts.

Some have argued that, through the ages, creation and flood stories were handed down, loosely based on what really had happened (hence some of the similarities), but distorted over time. In contrast, Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, revealed what had really taken place. Why does this explanation work better in accounting for the few similarities than does the idea that Moses borrowed from these pagan stories?

Genesis Versus Paganism

Far from being dependent upon ancient pagan creation myths, Genesis seems to have been written in a way that refutes those myths and distances God as Creator from them.

Read Genesis 1:14–19. How are the entities that appear on the fourth day described, and what are their functions?

The terms “sun” and “moon” were surely avoided because their names in Hebrew were the names (or closely related to the names) of the sun and moon gods of the ancient Near East and Egypt. The use of the terms “greater light” and “lesser light” showed that they were created for specific functions, “ ‘for signs and seasons, and for days and years’ ” and to “ ‘give light on the earth’ ” (*Gen. 1:14, 15, NKJV*). That is, the text shows very clearly that the sun and moon were not gods but created objects with specific natural functions, much as we understand them today.

Read Genesis 2:7, 18–24. How is God intimately involved in the creation of Adam and Eve?

The ancient Near Eastern myths unanimously depict man’s creation as an afterthought, resulting from an attempt to relieve the gods of hard labor. This mythical notion is contradicted by the biblical idea that man is to rule the world as God’s vice-regent. Nothing in the creation of humans was an afterthought. If anything, the text points to them as the climax of the Creation account, showing even more starkly how different the pagan and biblical accounts really are.

Genesis, thus, presents a corrective against the myths of the ancient world. Moses used certain terms and ideas incompatible with pagan concepts. And he did this by simply expressing the biblical understanding of reality, and of God’s role and purpose in Creation.

Thousands of years ago, the biblical Creation story was at odds with the prevailing culture. Today, the biblical Creation story is at odds with the prevailing culture. Why shouldn’t we be surprised?

Creation and Time

Read Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. How does the Bible trace the history of humanity from Adam to Noah—and from Noah to Abraham?

There is one element that makes these genealogies unique in the Bible: they contain the element of time, causing some scholars to correctly call them “chronogenealogies.” They contain an interlocking mechanism of descent information coupled with spans of time, so that “when *Person 1* had lived x years, he fathered *Person 2*. And *Person 1*, after he fathered *Person 2*, lived y years, and he fathered other sons and daughters.” Genesis 5 adds the formula phrase, “And all the days of *Person 1* were z years.” This interlocking system would have precluded deleting certain generations or adding them. Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 contain a continuous line of descent, as corroborated by 1 Chronicles 1:18–27, in which there are no added or missing generations. In this way the Bible interprets itself.

For nearly 2,000 years, Jewish and Christian expositors have interpreted these texts to represent history and an accurate way to determine the date of the Flood and the age of the earth, at least from the seven days of Creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

In recent decades, there have been attempts to reinterpret Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 to accommodate longer ages, as some archaeological and historical data are interpreted (by fallible human beings) to suggest. This raises serious questions about the reliability of the Bible record.

But if we are to understand God’s concept of time and its progression through history, we must recognize that these two chapters are “both historical and theological, linking Adam with the rest of humankind and God with man in the realm of the reaches of space and time. Genesis 5 and 11:10–26 provide the time framework and human chain that link God’s people with the man whom God created as the climax of the six-day creation event of this planet.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7/2 (1980), p. 69.

Though these texts in the Old Testament are there for good and important reasons, what does Paul say in 1 Timothy 1:4 and Titus 3:9 that we need to heed when talking about such texts?

Creation in Scripture

Read the following texts and write down how each writer referenced Genesis 1–11:

Matt. 19:4, 5 _____

Mark 10:6–9 _____

Luke 11:50, 51 _____

John 1:1–3 _____

Acts 14:15 _____

Rom. 1:20 _____

2 Cor. 4:6 _____

Eph. 3:9 _____

1 Tim. 2:12–15 _____

James 3:9 _____

1 Pet. 3:20 _____

Jude 11, 14 _____

Rev. 2:7; Rev. 3:14; Rev. 22:2, 3 _____

Jesus and *all* of the New Testament writers refer to Genesis 1–11 as reliable history. Jesus refers to Moses’ writings and the creation of male and female (*Matt. 19:4*). Paul often uses the Creation account to substantiate the theological points he makes in his epistles. He declared to the learned men of Athens, “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (*Acts 17:24, NASB*). In these ways, the New Testament writers built on the foundational nature of Genesis to show the modern reader the significance of this literal event.

Read Romans 5. More than half a dozen times, Paul makes a link from Adam to Jesus (*see Rom. 5:12, 14–19*). That is, he assumes the literal existence of a historical Adam, a position that becomes fatally compromised when an evolutionary model of origins replaces a literal reading of the texts.

If the New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself, viewed the Creation account as reliable history, why would it be foolish for us—based on the claims of fallen, fallible human beings—not to do the same?

Further Thought: Read Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed., *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2015).

“The Bible is the most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. . . . Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 25.

“I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But the time of their existence, and how long a period these things have been in the earth, are only to be understood by Bible history. It may be innocent to conjecture beyond Bible history, if our suppositions do not contradict the facts found in the sacred Scriptures. But when men leave the word of God in regard to the history of creation, and seek to account for God’s creative works upon natural principles, they are upon a boundless ocean of uncertainty. Just how God accomplished the work of creation in six literal days he has never revealed to mortals. His creative works are just as incomprehensible as his existence.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, book 3, p. 93.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When scientific explanations about present reality—what can be handled, heard, seen, tested and retested—are filled with debate and controversy, why do so many people unquestionably accept every scientific proclamation about events that supposedly occurred millions or even billions of years ago?
- ❷ Modern science works on the assumption (a reasonable one on the face of it) that you cannot use supernatural means to explain natural events. That is, you can’t try to explain, for instance, a famine by claiming that a witch put a curse on the land. However, what are the limitations of this approach when it comes to the Creation account as depicted in Genesis? In other words, the Genesis account was a purely supernatural event. If, however, you automatically rule out the supernatural as the means of creation, then why will any other model you come up with, of necessity, be wrong?

Missionary Asks, “Why?”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Leif Hongisto couldn't understand why he was heading home to Finland after serving for nine years as president of Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon. He loved the Seventh-day Adventist university, the Mediterranean climate, and freshly made hummus. Most important, he felt that he hadn't realized his full vision for the university, and the decision to go home caught him by surprise. “I was rather confused about why God was leading my life away from something that had become my whole life and was very close to my heart,” he said.

With many prayers and heavy hearts, he and his wife packed their suitcases, filled up boxes, and flew to Finland. As part of the process for missionaries returning home, Hongisto had to undergo a medical examination at the hospital. During the routine procedure, the doctor detected slightly raised PSA levels in Hongisto's blood, a possible sign of prostate cancer.

“Have you had any health complications?” the doctor asked.

Hongisto shook his head. “I feel great,” he said.

However, the doctor ordered a follow-up test. A couple months later, the PSA levels had risen even more, and the now-worried doctor called for additional tests and a biopsy. Soon, Hongisto was whisked away for a five-hour surgery, and the doctor removed a 3.5-ounce (100-gram) tumor. “It turned out that a routine medical checkup detected an aggressive cancer growth,” Hongisto said. “I began to understand why God led me back to Finland, where I would get very professional, up-to-date technology for treatment.”

Hongisto, 62, remains a missionary. He is in good health and serving as rector of Finland Junior College, a boarding academy and day school with about 185 students ages 6 to 18 in Piikkiö, a town in southwestern Finland. Many students at the school, founded in 1918, come from non-Adventist families. Finland itself is a highly secular country and has only 4,800 Adventists in a population of 5.5 million.

Reflecting on his 2018 move back to Finland, Hongisto has taken to heart the words of a speech that he gave at his first graduation ceremony at Finland Junior College in May 2018. He told the graduates, “You think life is in front of you and you have a vision of what it will look like. None of that will come true. Life will turn out very differently. But when you give it to God, a life lived in faith will always be more exciting, significant, and substantial than what you ever could have imagined.”



“That is true in my life,” said HONGISTO, pictured. “Life definitely surprises me positively each new day and is definitely better than what I could have imagined.” Finland is part of the Trans-European Division, which will receive the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter.

Key Texts: *Job 26:7–10; Genesis 1; Genesis 2; Genesis 5; Genesis 11; 1 Chron. 1:18–27; Matt. 19:4, 5; John 1:1–3.*

Part I: Overview

In 1872, while conducting research in the basement of the British Museum, George Smith translated an ancient Babylonian tablet that contained references to Utnapishtim, the survivor of the worldwide Flood, and to Gilgamesh, who sought to attain from him the secret to eternal life. Newspapers around the world reported the astonishing discovery of the Gilgamesh Epic and the first-ever reference to the Flood outside of Scripture. Since then, scholars have documented worldwide Flood stories from cultures around the world. Creation accounts have been found, as well. As these new archaeological discoveries during the last 150 years have uncovered such evidence, new questions have arisen about the origin and nature of the Creation and Flood accounts in the Bible. Is the biblical account of Genesis 1–11 simply borrowed from the ancient Near East? Does it contain mythical elements common to the other accounts? If the Genesis account is dependent in some way on the earlier accounts from Mesopotamia or Egypt, what are the implications historically and theologically? How does one explain the similarities and differences found in the different accounts? How do these accounts speak to the question of cosmology, or the origin and structure of the universe? Is the Bible also to be considered a mythological text like those from Egypt and Mesopotamia? These and other questions will be the topic of this week's study as we explore the Bible against its Near Eastern and Egyptian environment.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

Galileo Galilei concluded that the sun was the center of the solar system, with the earth and the other planets revolving around the sun (heliocentric worldview). But there were others in the Catholic Church who taught that the earth was the center of the universe (geocentric worldview). This led to a trial by the Inquisition, in which Galileo was forced to recant and was placed under house arrest until his death in 1642. The Galileo affair has often been cited as an example in which the Bible holds back science. But this raises several questions. Did the church's interpretation, which

was used to condemn Galileo, really derive from the Bible? Was Galileo opposed to the Bible in favor of science? In fact, the Catholic Church had adopted a cosmology based on Greek Aristotelian philosophy and Ptolemy's mathematics, which it then tried to defend on the basis of the Bible. Galileo responded by defending his interpretation on the basis of the Bible, as well. First, he asserted that God is the author of both nature and the Bible. If properly understood, they would be in harmony. Second, Galileo pointed out that later interpreters can err. Then he stated that the language used in the Bible is adapted to the common person and should not always be taken in a literalistic way. Finally, he argued against the consistency of the literal reading of Joshua's insistence that the sun stand still over Gibeah (*Josh. 10:12*), in light of the prevailing Ptolemaic view that the earth always was still and stood in the center of the universe, because in that case the day would have been shorter, not longer (Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* [South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1991], pp. 68, 69). Today there is no doubt which interpretation was correct. But it took the Catholic Church more than 350 years to exonerate Galileo, which it did in 1992.

The lesson for us is that the Bible interpreter must not read the Bible through the lens of the cosmologies of the ancient Near East, Egypt, Greece, or the latest modern worldview. When there are difficulties of understanding, then careful consideration of the context, language patterns, and sense of the biblical passage is important.

Scripture

Does the Bible contain an antiquated view of cosmology? For centuries, critical scholars thought that Genesis 1 reflected the ideas of the ancient Babylonians. Thus, they insisted that the term *těhôm*, "deep," derived from the name *Tiamat*, the goddess of the primeval ocean world in the *Enuma Elish* epic. The epic depicts the Babylonian god Marduk slaying Tiamat in mortal combat. Today it is recognized that *těhôm* is simply a term for a large body of water that is completely nonmythical. In fact, it is "impossible to conclude that *těhôm* 'ocean' was borrowed from *Tiamat*."—David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Genesis and the Flood: An Introduction," in *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 31. To suggest that Genesis 1 reflects a pagan conflict between the gods is to read into the text something that the text actually combats. The description of the passive, powerless, and unorganized state of the "deep" in Genesis 1:2 reveals that the term is nonmythical in content and antimythical in purpose.

The term *rāqîa'* is sometimes translated "firmament," from the term *firmamentum* in the Vulgate Latin translation of the Old Testament, which gives a false impression that the firmament is a solid metal dome. However,

the term *rāqia'* is better rendered “expanse,” as can be seen in Psalm 19:1 and Daniel 12:3. Likewise, does rain literally come through the “windows of heaven” (*Gen. 7:11, Gen. 8:2*)? In other passages, barley (*2 Kings 7:1, 2*), trouble and anguish (*Isa. 24:18, 19*), or blessings (*Mal. 3:10*) come through the “windows of heaven.” These expressions are clearly nonliteral and serve as metaphors in the same way that the saying *windows of the mind* is used today. If the Bible is read and interpreted on its own terms, it is usually not difficult to detect and recognize such language. Attempts to read into Scripture some kind of three-storied universe with a metal dome containing windows held up by pillars with an underworld below is to take that which is intended as nonliteral within the context of these passages and to interpret it literally. In fact, the Bible writers intentionally separated themselves from such mythical ideas that blended the realm of the gods and humans. We can refer to this intention as a polemical approach to the myths of the ancient Near East and Egypt.

Creation by the Word. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (*Gen. 1:3*). This mode of Creation is in direct contrast to the ancient myths. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk creates by gruesomely splitting Tiamat. In the *Atra-Ḥasis* epic, humankind is created from the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god mixed with clay. In Egypt, creation of man comes as the result of self-generation or emanation from the gods. But in Genesis there is no hint of deity in humanity itself. Humans are separate creatures from God.

Sea creatures. On the fifth day of Creation (*Gen. 1:20–23*), God created the “great whales” (*KJV*) or “great sea monsters,” as more recent translations (*RSV, NEB, NASB*) render the Hebrew term. In Ugaritic texts, a related term appears as a personified monster, or dragon, who was overcome by the goddess Anath, the creator god. But God’s totally effortless Creation of these large aquatic creatures, as expressed through the verb “create,” stresses effortless Creation and exhibits a deliberate argument against the mythical idea of creation by battle or combat.

Seven-day week. “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” (*Gen. 2:2, ESV*). In Egyptian cosmologies there is no finality to creation. Rather, the cycle of recurrent creation of the sun god Amun-Re takes place daily. This concept of life and death is so intrinsic to Egyptian thinking that death itself is seen as part of the normal order of creation. A Twenty-First Dynasty funerary papyrus shows a winged serpent with the caption “death, the great god, who made gods and men”—a “personification of death as a creator god and an impressive visual realization of the idea that death is a necessary feature of the world of creation.”—Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 81.

The exalted conception of the Genesis account of Creation presents, at its center, a transcendent God who, as supreme and unique Creator, speaks the world into existence. The center of all Creation is humankind as male and female. The Genesis cosmology unveils most comprehensively the foundations on which the biblical world reality and worldview rest. Genesis gives us a picture of totality that sets the entire tone for the rest of Scripture. Scripture is able to speak about the events of the end because He who made all things at the beginning is still sovereign over His creation (see further Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, “The Unique Cosmology of Genesis 1 against Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian Parallels,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015], pp. 9–29).

Part III: Life Application

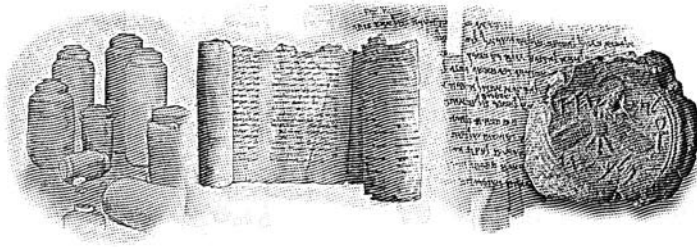
The idea that the Bible is an antiquated book with little relevance to the major questions of the twenty-first century is prevalent in our culture today. The evolutionary worldview derives, in large part, from the mythical idea that there is no distinct boundary between humans, the natural world, and the world of the divine. These are all one. In Hinduism, we evolve through reincarnation into another life-form when we die. God is in all and is all. According to Hinduism, there are 33 million gods as personified through nature. This concept goes back to ancient Egypt where there were 22,000 gods and where death and life were perceived as part of the great circle of life.

- 1. Why is it important for us as Christians to understand that we were created in a perfect, sinless state at a time when death did not exist? Why is choice, as described in Genesis 3, important? How was the wrong choice of one man, Adam, made right in the choice of the Son of man, Jesus Christ?**

- 2. How does an evolutionary theory of millions of years of the death and dying of one species after another in a holocaust of pain provide any hope for the future? If death was always the other side to life in this universe, could there ever be an existence without death?**

- 3. How is the Bible's teaching on life and death completely different from that of the other major world religions? In what way does Christ's physical death and bodily resurrection make all the difference in the world? Share why you have hope today in the promises found in Scripture.**

The Bible *as* History



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 17, Isa. 36:1–3, Isa. 37:14–38, Daniel 1, Daniel 5, Matt. 26:57–67, Heb. 11:1–40.*

Memory Text: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (*Exod. 20:2 [also Deut. 5:6], NKJV*).

The Bible is constituted in history. Biblical history moves in a linear direction from an absolute beginning, when God created all things, to an ultimate goal, when He will restore the earth at His second coming.

The historical nature of Scripture is one characteristic that distinguishes it from the sacred books of other religions. The Bible assumes the existence of a God who personally acts in history; it does not try to prove that existence. In the beginning, God speaks, and life on earth is created (*Gen. 1:1–31*). He calls Abram out of the Chaldees. He delivers His people from the bondage of Egypt. He writes the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone with His own finger (*Exod. 31:18*). He sends prophets. He sends judgments. He calls people to live and share His divine law and the plan of salvation with other nations. Ultimately, He sends His Son Jesus Christ into the world, thus dividing history forever.

This week, we'll look at some of the key issues in history as portrayed in the Bible and at some of the archaeological evidence that helps substantiate history as expressed in the Bible.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.

David, Solomon, and the Monarchy

The monarchy of David and Solomon represents the golden age in Israel's history. But what if David and Solomon did not exist, as some have claimed? What if their kingdom was not as extensive as the Bible describes, as some also have claimed? Without David there would be no Jerusalem, the capital of the nation (*2 Sam. 5:6–10*). Without David there would be no temple built by his son, Solomon (*1 Kings 8:17–20*). Finally, without David there would be no future Messiah, for it is through the line of David that a Messiah is promised (*Jer. 23:5, 6; Rev. 22:16*). Israelite history would need to be completely rewritten. Yet, that history, as it reads in Scripture, is precisely what gives Israel and the church its unique role and mission.

Read 1 Samuel 17. How does God provide a decisive victory for Israel? Who is used for this victory? Where does the victory take place?

Notice the precise geographical description of the battle lines in 1 Samuel 17:1–3. The site of Khirbet Qeiyafa is located on the hills exactly in the area of the Israelite camp described in this chapter. Recent excavations there revealed a massively fortified, garrison city from the time of Saul and David overlooking the valley. Two contemporaneous gates were excavated. Since most cities in ancient Israel had only one gate, this characteristic may help identify the site as Shaaraim (*1 Sam. 17:52*), which in Hebrew means “two gates.”

If this is the case, then we have identified for the first time this ancient biblical city. In 2008 and 2013, two inscriptions were found that many believe represent the oldest Hebrew writing ever discovered. The second inscription mentions the name Eshbaal, the same name as one of Saul's sons (*1 Chron. 9:39*).

In 1993, excavations at the northern city of Tel Dan uncovered a monumental inscription written by King Hazael of Damascus, who records his victory over the “king of Israel” and the king of the “house of David.” This is the same way the dynasty of David is described in the Bible, adding more powerful archaeological evidence that David existed in history, just as the Bible says.

Think through the implications of what it would mean for our faith if, as some people claim, King David did not really exist?

Isaiah, Hezekiah, and Sennacherib

Read Isaiah 36:1–3 and Isaiah 37:14–38. In this account of a massive Assyrian campaign against Judah, how does God deliver His people?

In 701 B.C., Sennacherib campaigns against Judah. The account is recorded in Scripture. It also is recorded by Sennacherib himself in several ways. In his historical annals, discovered in the capital city of Nineveh, he boasts, “Forty-six of his [Hezekiah’s] strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages in their neighborhood I besieged and conquered.” In Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh he celebrates his defeat of the Judean city of Lachish by covering the walls of a central room of the palace with relief depictions of his siege and battle against the city.

Recent excavations at Lachish have uncovered the massive destruction debris of the city after it was burned by Sennacherib. But Jerusalem is miraculously spared. Sennacherib is able to boast only this: “As for Hezekiah the Judean, I shut him in his city like a bird in a cage.” There is no description of destroying Jerusalem, and no account of captives being taken into slavery.

It is true that Jerusalem was besieged, but the Bible records that the siege lasted for one day only, as the Angel of the Lord delivers Jerusalem. As Isaiah had predicted, “ ‘Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David’ ” (*Isa. 37:33–35, RSV*).

Interestingly, only Lachish is prominently depicted in Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Jerusalem is not found on the palace walls. Sennacherib could boast only of his defeat of Lachish. The showdown between the God of heaven and the gods of the Assyrians is demonstrated in the deliverance of His people. He sees the acts of aggression by Assyria. He hears the words of Hezekiah’s prayer. God acts in history.

How can you remember that the God who so miraculously delivered Israel at this time and place is the same God whom you pray to, rely on, and trust in today?

Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylon

In July 2007, a scholar from the University of Vienna was working on a project in the British Museum when he found a tablet from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. On the tablet, he found the name “Nebusarsekim,” the name of a Babylonian official mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3. Nebusarsekim is one of many individuals, both kings and officials, who (thanks to archaeology) have been rediscovered from the time of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.

Read Daniel 1 and Daniel 5. How do the early decisions of Daniel correspond to the acts of God in using him as His servant and prophet to impact millions of people through history?

Daniel “purposed in his heart” (*Dan. 1:8*) to remain faithful to God in regard to what he both ate and prayed. These good habits, formed early in his experience, became the pattern that would give him strength for his long life. The result was clear thinking, wisdom, and understanding that came from on high. This was recognized by Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, so that he was elevated to the highest positions in the kingdom. But, perhaps more important, it resulted in the conversion of King Nebuchadnezzar himself (*Dan. 4:34–37*).

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of Nabopolassar. Together they built up a glorious city, unsurpassed in the ancient world (*Dan. 4:30*). The city of Babylon was enormous, with more than 300 temples, an exquisite palace, and surrounded by huge double walls 12 and 22 feet thick. The walls were punctuated by eight major gates, all named after the major Babylonian deities. The most famous is the Ishtar gate, excavated by the Germans and reconstructed in the Pergamom Museum in Berlin.

In Daniel 7:4, Babylon is described as a lion with eagle wings. The processional way leading up to the Ishtar gate is lined with images of 120 lions. An image of a huge lion pouncing on a man also was found during excavations and still stands today outside the city. These all testify to the lion as an appropriate symbol for Babylon the Great. Biblical history and its prophetic message are confirmed.

Daniel 1:8 said that Daniel “purposed in his heart.” What does that mean? What are some things that you need to “purpose in your heart” about doing or not doing?

The Historical Jesus

Read Matthew 26:57–67, John 11:45–53, and John 18:29–31. Who was Caiaphas, and what was his role in the death of Christ? Who was Pontius Pilate, and how was his decision most important for the Sanhedrin to accomplish its goals?

Caiaphas was high priest and instigated the plot to seek the death of Jesus. His existence also is recorded by Josephus, the Jewish historian writing in behalf of the Romans. “Besides which he also deprived Joseph, who was also called Caiphas [*sic*], of the high priesthood, and appointed Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him.”—*Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1969), book 18, chapter 4, p. 381.

In 1990, a family tomb was discovered south of Jerusalem containing 12 ossuaries, or bone boxes. The coins and pottery from the tomb date it to around the middle of the first century A.D. The most ornate of the ossuaries, with multiple sets of bones in it, contains the name “Joseph son of Caiaphas.” Many scholars believe this to have been the tomb and bone box of Caiaphas, the high priest so directly involved in the death of Jesus.

In 1961, an inscription bearing the name of Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea under Emperor Tiberius, was found on a stone in the theater at Caesarea Maritima.

Thus, in both of these cases, some of the principal figures surrounding the death of Christ have been corroborated by history.

Secular historians of the first two centuries also speak of Jesus of Nazareth. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes of Christ, His execution by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, and early Christians in Rome. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, writes in A.D. 112–113 to the emperor Trajan, asking how he should treat the Christians. He describes them as meeting on a certain day before light where they gather and sing hymns as to a god.

These archaeological discoveries and historical sources provide an extra, nonbiblical framework for the existence of Jesus, who was worshipped within the first 50 years after His death. The Gospels themselves are the primary sources about Jesus, and we should study them carefully to learn more about Jesus and His life.

Though it's always nice to have archaeological evidence that supports our faith, why must we learn not to make our faith depend upon these things, as helpful as they might at times be?

Faith and History

We don't live in vacuums. Our choices influence not just ourselves, but others, as well. In the same way, the lives of many of God's ancient people have had a great impact on the future of others besides themselves. In Hebrews 11, that well-known "faith" chapter, we see in summary the influence of many of these ancient heroes of faith.

Read Hebrews 11:1–40. What lessons can we learn from these ancient heroes and by studying their lives?

Enoch _____

Noah _____

Abraham _____

Sarah _____

Joseph _____

Moses _____

Rahab _____

Samson _____

Faith is not simply a belief in something or someone; it is acting in response to that belief. It is a faith that works; this is what is reckoned as righteousness. It is those faith actions that change history. Each of these actions depends on a reliance on God's Word.

Noah acted in faith when he built the ark, trusting in the Word of God over experience and reason. Because it had never rained, experience and reason suggested that a flood made absolutely no sense. But Noah obeyed God, and the human race survived. Abraham, then called Abram, left Ur in southern Mesopotamia, the most sophisticated city in the world at that time, and went out, not knowing where God would lead him. But he chose to act on God's Word. Moses chose to become a shepherd leading God's people to the Promised Land rather than to become the king over Egypt, the greatest empire of its day. He trusted in the Almighty's voice, calling out from the burning bush. Rahab decided to trust the reports of God's deliverance, protected the two spies, and became part of the lineage of Jesus. How little we know about how our decisions will affect the lives of countless people in this generation and those to come!

What crucial decisions are impending before you? How do you make the choices that you do, and why?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “David and Goliath,” pp. 643–648, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Hezekiah,” pp. 331–339; “Deliverance From Assyria,” pp. 349–366, in *Prophets and Kings*; section 4.k., in “Methods of Bible Study,” which can be found at <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study>.

“The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research in vain seeks to penetrate. In God’s word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 173.

“He who has a knowledge of God and His Word has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He does not test the Bible by man’s ideas of science. He brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that God’s word is truth, and truth can never contradict itself; whatever in the teaching of so-called science contradicts the truth of God’s revelation is mere human guesswork.

“To the really wise, scientific research opens vast fields of thought and information.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

1 Flesh out the question asked at the end of Wednesday’s study. Yes, it’s good when we find archaeological evidence that confirms biblical history. But what happens when archaeological evidence is found that is interpreted in ways that contradict the biblical story? What should this tell us about the fact that we must depend on the Word of God as the Word of God and trust it as such, regardless of the claims of archaeology or any other human science?

2 Think about all biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled in the past that, from today’s vantage point, we can see as having been fulfilled. Think, for example, of most of the kingdoms of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. How can we learn from these prophecies, which have been fulfilled in history, and to trust the Lord about the prophecies that are yet for the future?

From Armenia to Cyprus

By ERMINE ORPHANIDI

I was born in Armenia to a Greek father and an Armenian mother. From childhood, I believed in God and wanted to own a Bible. But at the time, Bibles were hard to find and very expensive in Armenia.

One day, a Seventh-day Adventist neighbor invited me to a series of meetings. Those who attended faithfully would receive a free Bible. I jumped at the idea of finally owning a Bible.

Death always bothered me. It seemed like such a meaningless end to life. Then the preacher spoke about the resurrection at Jesus' second coming. It was amazing. I can still vividly remember the picture that he showed of resurrected people coming out of their graves. When a call was made for baptism, I was the first to stand.

Something happened. Before baptism, I tried to read the Bible a few times, but I couldn't understand it. I wondered how others could spend hours reading it. After baptism, everything began to make sense. I consider this to be one of the many miracles that God has performed in my life.

Four months after my baptism, I moved to Cyprus. Though part Greek, I did not speak Greek and felt like a stranger in a strange land. For 16 years I didn't know about the Adventist church in Cyprus. Many trials came my way, but God stood by me.

Then, through a friend, I located the church. Apprehension filled me on my first visit. How would the church members relate to me? All apprehension vanished as the members enveloped me with love. To this day, my church is my family, my second home.

Since that first visit five years ago, I have hardly missed a Sabbath. Now I am fluent in Greek. I enjoy teaching adult and teen Sabbath School classes. Even more remarkable, my mother, sister-in-law, and two nieces also attend church with me. The love of the members won them over. I am waiting and praying for the day, soon, when my son will also take his stand for Jesus.



I thank God for His goodness and look forward to a happy life with Him here and for eternity.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help construct a new church building and community center in Nicosia, Cyprus. Thank you for helping to spread the gospel around the world.

Key Texts: *1 Samuel 17, Daniel 1, 5, Isa. 36:1–3, Isa. 37:14–38, Matt. 26:57–67, Heb. 11:1–40.*

Part I: Overview

History is important because all life is rooted in history. There is no human existence outside of history. History is the fabric of life. It is where God chose to place us and to reveal Himself. Because the Bible is historically constituted, history is the “place,” if you will, where God gives us an opportunity to test and confirm the truthfulness of His Word. That is why history and historical details are where the trustworthiness of the Bible is challenged the most and where criticism often begins first. Paul addresses this very issue with the church in Corinth when he brings up how some in the church have questioned the testimony of the apostle’s word: “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (*1 Cor. 15:12–14*). Paul affirmed that the trustworthiness of the *historical event* of Christ’s bodily resurrection was the keystone of the Christian faith. If that event did not take place, then our faith is based on a pious hoax, not on reality. Biblical faith is based on the facts of history. It is based on a God who acts in history, and it is biblical history that is the subject of this week’s study.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

Old Testament theologian Walter Dietrich wrote recently, “In the modern age, history must be understood and described *etsi deus non daretur* (‘as though God did not exist’).” But he admits that this is difficult when assessing biblical history. In the Bible “God plays an active role. . . . God gets personally involved. . . . He sends prophets. . . . He moves events.” Dietrich concludes, “What enlightened person can accept all these things as historical accounts?”—*The Early Monarchy in Israel: The Tenth Century B.C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 102, 103. A whole array of *critical* methods has removed the historical framework of the Bible and its teachings, denying the very events that God has given to confirm His personal work throughout the lives of His people. During the last 200 years, these methods of the enlightenment have often been used to deconstruct the plain teaching of the Bible. Historical criti-

cism brings into question events, and even entire periods, in the Bible and relegates them to myth, saga, story, or merely theology in the sense of human imagination. These periods include the Creation, the Flood, the patriarchal period, the sojourn in Egypt, the Exodus and conquest, the united monarchy, et cetera. New Testament scholars using these methods have dissected the sayings of Jesus in order to determine, they claim, what He really said and what others attributed (falsely) to Him. Many of our young people are faced with these critical approaches when they attend secular universities. This raises some important questions for the serious Bible student. Do historical events really matter to faith? How can I live by faith when that faith is challenged by modern and postmodern thinking? How does the Bible as God's inspired Word open my eyes and expand my thinking?

Scripture

As serious students of the Bible, we must ask whether the Bible should be evaluated on the external assumptions and norms of modernism and postmodernism or whether the Bible should be evaluated on its own terms. The internal testimony of Scripture indicates that God spoke to His people through prophets and sometimes directly. He addressed them in both time and space. That is, He acted in *real* time (events) among *real* people in *actual* places.

People. The existence of at least one hundred biblical individuals, including kings, servants, scribes, and governors has been confirmed through careful archaeological and historical research. In the last two decades, many more people were added to this list through the discovery of seals, seal impressions, small inscriptions, and monumental inscriptions. Here are only a few examples.

Baalis. In 1984, at the site of Tell el-ʿUmeiri in Jordan, archaeologists from Andrews University uncovered a clay seal impression bearing the name “Milkom’ur . . . servant of Baalyasha,” undoubtedly a reference to Baalis, the king of ancient Ammon, mentioned in Jeremiah 40:14. This obscure king was said to have plotted against Judah on the verge of the Babylonian destruction (Randall W. Younker, “Israel, Judah, and Ammon and the Motifs on the Baalis Seal from Tell el-ʿUmeiri,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 48/3 [1985], pp. 173–180).

Isaiah the Prophet. Excavations in Jerusalem in 2009 uncovered a seal impression containing the name “Isaiah, [the] prophe[t].” Excavator Eilat Mazar believes that this was in fact the seal impression of Isaiah the prophet. It was found less than ten feet away from the seal impression of “Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, King of Judah”—Eilat Mazar, “Is This the Prophet Isaiah’s Signature?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 44/2&3 2018, pp. 64–73, 92. In 2014, students from Southern Adventist University uncovered two seal impressions of Eliakim at the city of Lachish.

According to Isaiah 37:1, 2, all three individuals—Hezekiah, Eliakim, and Isaiah—were present in Jerusalem during the invasion of Sennacherib into Judah.

Herod the Great. In 1996, students working with Ehud Netzer at Masada, Herod's desert fortress, uncovered an imported fragment of a wine amphora. On the fragment was an inscription: *regi Herodi Iudaico*, "for Herod, king of Judaea." It was the first mention of Herod the Great's title outside of the New Testament and of Josephus found in an archaeological context ("Pottery With a Pedigree: Herod Inscription Surfaces at Masada," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22/6 [November–December, 1996] p. 27).

Cities. Dozens of sites in the Middle East have been excavated, revealing their secrets and confirming the existence of thriving cultures as described in the Bible. Excavations at Babylon revealed colorful glazed brick walls covered with images of lions, griffins, and bulls. The ruins of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were surrounded by massive double walls and gates, attributed to the building activities of Solomon (*1 Kings 9:15*).

The Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath have been excavated extensively, revealing a sophisticated culture of architecture, art, and technology. In 1996, an inscription was uncovered at Ekron revealing a dynastic line of five kings including Achish, the son of Padi, who ruled over Ekron until the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar (Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *Israel Exploration Journal* 47/1–2 [1997]: pp. 9–16). The decorated Aegean-style pottery and the technology of these cities reveal that the Philistines were the elite in the ancient land of Canaan. To this short list could be added dozens of other sites, such as Jericho, Jerusalem, Acco, Dan, Abel, Azekah, Libnah, all currently being excavated in the Middle East.

Events. One of the most illustrated events of the Bible is the campaign of Sennacherib against Judah in 701 B.C., as recorded in Isaiah 36, 37; 2 Kings 18, 19; and 2 Chronicles 32. Excavations at Nineveh in modern Iraq have discovered the annals of King Sennacherib, who describes his campaign against Judah in detail: "As for Hezekiah the Judean, who did not submit to my yoke, I shut him up in his royal city like a bird in a cage." Carved reliefs in the central room of his palace depict the Assyrian attack against the city of Lachish, its defeat, and the procession of prisoners before the king seated on a throne. Recent excavations from 2013–2017 by Southern Adventist University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem excavated the massive destruction of Lachish in Israel, recovering dozens of arrowheads, sling stones, and items of scale armor amid the debris left behind by the Assyrian armies. Yet, Jerusalem was spared, a vivid testimony to the accuracy of the biblical record concerning this event.

Yet, after 200 years, archaeology has barely scratched the surface of what could be found. Only a fraction of the hundreds of sites that existed have been located today. Only a fraction of those located sites have been excavated. Only a fraction of those excavated sites have been excavated to any real extent (often less than 5 percent). Only a fraction of those excavations have been published. And only a fraction of those that have been published make a direct contribution to understanding the people and events of the Bible. We should therefore not be surprised that many people, places, and events remain to be discovered. As hundreds of archaeologists, volunteers, and other specialists are uncovering these ancient remains, more evidence continues to accumulate to confirm the historical framework of the Bible, filling in the details of how the people of these ancient cultures worked, lived, and interacted with one another.

Part III: Life Application

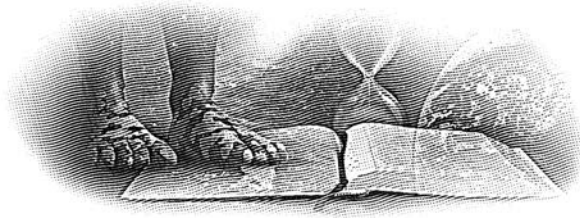
History is not merely a dry subject to pass in high school and college or to discuss in this class. It is our story, and it is “His story.” If God has been personally working throughout the history of the world, do you believe He is still active in your life today? Do we still experience miraculous deliverances from the powers of our enemies, disease, and hardship? We often read of the miracles performed in the Bible and wonder whether such miracles still occur today. Don’t they? If we were to collect the true miracle stories of God’s healings, the dreams He has sent, and His work over the course of our personal lives today from our church family around the world, would we not be able to fill a book?

- 1. Share with your class how God has worked in your life. What has He done for you or maybe a family member or friend? Pose this question to your class. What testimonies do they have to share in response?**

2. A young Adventist starts classes at a public university and is confronted with a professor who states in the beginning of class that, while some of the students in class may have grown up in churches and synagogues, now they are at university and will learn what actually happened in the past. How should that student respond in this situation?

Notes

The Bible *and* Prophecy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 2:27–45, John 14:29, Num. 14:34, Dan. 7:1–25, Dan. 8:14, 1 Cor. 10:1–13.*

Memory Text: “And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (*Daniel 8:14, KJV*).

Bible prophecy is crucial to our identity and mission. Prophecy provides an internal and external mechanism to confirm the accuracy of God's Word. Jesus said, “ ‘And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe’ ” (*John 14:29, NKJV*; see also *John 13:19*). This presents a crucial question: How do we interpret prophecy correctly so that we know when the prophecy has, indeed, come to pass?

During the Reformation, the reformers followed the historicist method. This method is the same one Daniel and John used as the key for their own interpretation. The historicist method sees prophecy as a progressive and continuous fulfillment of history, starting in the past and ending with God's eternal kingdom.

This week, we will study the pillars of historicist prophetic interpretation. “We are to see in history the fulfillment of prophecy, to study the workings of Providence in the great reformatory movements, and to understand the progress of events in the marshalling of the nations for the final conflict of the great controversy.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 307.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 13.

Historicism and Prophecy

The foundational method that Seventh-day Adventists apply for studying Bible prophecies is called historicism. It's the idea that many of the major prophecies in the Bible follow an unbroken linear flow of history, from past to present, and to future. It's similar to how you might study history in school. We do it this way because that is how the Bible itself interprets these prophecies for us.

Read Daniel 2:27–45. What aspects of the dream indicate a continuous, uninterrupted succession of powers throughout history? In what way do we have the Bible itself showing us how to interpret apocalyptic (end-time) prophecy?

Note that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is recognized as the head of gold. Thus, Daniel identifies Babylon as the first kingdom (*Dan. 2:38*). Then Daniel says, “ ‘But after you shall arise another kingdom . . . then another, a third kingdom’ ” (*Dan. 2:39, NKJV*) and then a fourth (*Dan. 2:40*). That these are in succession one after another without any gaps also is implied in the image itself, for each of the kingdoms is represented in parts of a larger body moving from the head down to the toes. They are connected, just as time and history are connected.

In Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, instead of an image, specific beast symbols are used, but the same thing is taught. We are given an unbroken sequence of four earthly kingdoms (three in Daniel 8). They start in antiquity, and go through history, up to the present and into the future, when Christ returns and God establishes His eternal kingdom.

Thus, the image of Daniel 2 and the successive visions of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 provided the basis for the Protestant historicist interpretation of prophecy, which Seventh-day Adventists still uphold today.

Read John 14:29. What does Jesus say that helps us to understand how prophecy can function?

What great advantage do we have today, living when so much history already has unfolded, that someone living in the time of Babylon would not have had?

The Year-Day Principle

One of the interpretative keys of historicism is the year-day principle. Many scholars throughout the centuries applied this principle to the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. They derived the principle from several key texts and from the immediate context of the prophecies themselves.

Read Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. How does God spell out the year-day principle in these specific texts?

In these texts, we can see very clearly the idea of the year-day principle. But how do we justify using this principle with some of the time prophecies, such as in Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 8:14, as well as Revelation 11:2, 3; Revelation 12:6, 14; and Revelation 13:5?

Three other elements support the year-day principle in these prophecies of Daniel and Revelation: the use of symbols, long time periods, and peculiar expressions.

First, the symbolic nature of the beasts and horns representing kingdoms suggests that the time expressions also should be understood as symbolic. The beasts and horns are not to be taken literally. They are symbols for something else. Hence, because the rest of the prophecy is symbolic, not literal, why should we take the time prophecies alone as literal? The answer, of course, is that we shouldn't.

Second, many of the events and kingdoms depicted in the prophecies cover a time span of many centuries, which would be impossible if the time prophecies depicting them were taken literally. Once the year-day principle is applied, the time fits the events in a remarkably accurate way, something that would be impossible if the time prophecies were taken literally.

Finally, the peculiar expressions used to designate these time periods suggest a symbolic interpretation. In other words, the ways in which time is expressed in these prophecies (for example, the "2,300 evenings and mornings" of Daniel 8:14, NIV) are not the normal ways to express time, showing us that the time periods depicted are to be taken symbolically, not literally.

Look at the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. We read that “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*) will be a literal 69 weeks, or just one year and four months and one week. The prophecy makes no sense when understood that way, does it? What happens, however, when we apply the Bible’s own year-day principle—and the 70 weeks become 490 years?

Identifying the Little Horn

For centuries, the Protestant reformers identified the little-horn power of Daniel 7 and in Daniel 8 as the Roman church. Why?

Read Daniel 7:1–25 and Daniel 8:1–13. What are the common characteristics of the little horn in both chapters? How can we identify it?

There are seven common characteristics between the little horns of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8: (1) both are described as a horn; (2) both are persecuting powers (*Dan. 7:21, 25; Dan. 8:10, 24*); (3) both are self-exalting and blasphemous (*Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; Dan. 8:10, 11, 25*); (4) both target God's people (*Dan. 7:25, Dan. 8:24*); (5) both have aspects of their activity delineated by prophetic time (*Dan. 7:25; Dan. 8:13, 14*); (6) both extend until the end of time (*Dan. 7:25, 26; Dan. 8:17, 19*); and (7) both are to be supernaturally destroyed (*Dan. 7:11, 26; Dan. 8:25*).

History identifies the first kingdom as Babylon (*Dan. 2:38*), the second as Media-Persia (*Daniel 8:20*), and the third as Greece (*Dan. 8:21*). History is unequivocal that after these world empires comes Rome.

In Daniel 2, the iron representing Rome *continues* into the feet of iron mixed with clay; that is, until the end of time. The little horn of Daniel 7 comes forth from the fourth beast but remains *part of* this fourth beast.

What power came out of Rome and continues its politico-religious influence for at least 1,260 years (*see Dan. 7:25*)? Only one power fits history and prophecy—the papacy. The papacy came into power among the 10 barbarian tribes of Europe and uprooted three of them (*Dan. 7:24*). The papacy was “ ‘different from the previous ones’ ” (*Dan. 7:24, NASB*), indicating its uniqueness compared to the other tribes. The papacy spoke “ ‘pompous words against the Most High’ ” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV*) and “exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host” (*Dan. 8:11, NKJV*) by usurping the role of Jesus and replacing it with the pope. The papacy fulfilled the prediction of persecuting “ ‘the saints of the Most High’ ” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV*) and casting down “some of the host” (*Dan 8:10, NKJV*) during the Counter-Reformation, when Protestants were slaughtered. The papacy sought “ ‘to change times and law’ ” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV*) by removing the second commandment and changing the Sabbath to Sunday.

In Daniel 2, Daniel 7, and Daniel 8, after Greece, one power arises that exists to the end of time. What power could that be other than Rome, now in its papal stage? No matter how politically incorrect, why is this a crucial teaching of the three angels' messages, and hence, a crucial component of present truth?

The Investigative Judgment

The prophetic outline studied this week has found overwhelming support among Protestant historicists since the Reformation. But it was not until the Millerite movement in the early 1800s that the 2,300 days and the investigative judgment were carefully reconsidered and studied. Look at the following chart:

Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon (lion)	_____
Media-Persia (bear)	Media-Persia (ram)
Greece (leopard)	Greece (he-goat)
Pagan Rome (fourth beast)	Pagan Rome (horn moves horizontally)
Papal Rome (little horn)	Papal Rome (horn moves vertically)

Read Daniel 7:9–14 and Daniel 8:14, 26. What is happening in heaven as depicted in these texts?

After the period of medieval persecution, which ended in 1798 with the capture and imprisonment of the pope by Napoleon’s General Berthier (*Rev. 13:3*), Daniel 7 and 8 speak of judgment. The judgment is to take place in heaven where “‘the court was seated’ ” (*Dan. 7:10, NKJV*) and “‘One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven . . . came to the Ancient of Days’ ” (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*). This is a judgment scene that occurs after 1798 and before the second coming of Jesus.

This judgment scene in Daniel 7 is directly parallel to the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14. They are talking about the same thing. According to Daniel 8:14, the time of this “cleansing of the sanctuary,” which is Day of Atonement terminology, is 2,300 evening-mornings, or days. With the year-day principle, these days represent 2,300 years.

The starting point of the 2,300 years is found in Daniel 9:24, in which the 70-week (490 year) prophecy is *chatak*, or “cut off,” from the 2,300-day vision (*Dan. 9:24*). In fact, many scholars correctly see the 2,300-day (year) prophecy of Daniel 8:14 and the 70-week prophecy (490-years) of Daniel 9:24–27 as two parts of one prophecy. The next verse in the 70-week prophecy, Daniel 9:25, gives the beginning of the time period, “‘from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem’ ” (*NKJV*). The date for this event is “the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king” (*Ezra 7:7*), or 457 B.C. Counting forward 2,300 years, we come to 1844, which is not long after 1798 and before the second coming of Jesus. This is when Jesus entered into the Most Holy and began His work of intercession, of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary. See the chart in Friday’s study.

Typology as Prophecy

The symbols of apocalyptic prophecies, such as those found in Daniel and Revelation, have one single fulfillment. For example, the he-goat found its fulfillment in Greece, a singular kingdom (*Dan. 8:21*). After all, the text came right out and named it for us! How much clearer could it be?

Typology, however, focuses on actual persons, events, or institutions of the Old Testament that are founded in a historical reality but that point forward to greater reality in the future. The use of typology as a method of interpretation goes back to Jesus and the New Testament writers, and is even found in the Old Testament itself. The only guide to recognizing a type and antitype is when an inspired writer of Scripture identifies them.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–13. To what events in history does Paul refer as he admonishes the Corinthian church? How does this relate to us today?

Paul refers back to the historical reality of the Exodus and develops a typology based on the experience of the ancient Hebrews in the wilderness. In this way, Paul shows that God, who inspired Moses to record these events, intended that “these things became our examples” (*1 Cor. 10:6, NKJV*), thereby admonishing spiritual Israel to endure temptation as we live in the last days.

Read the passages below and write down each type and antitype fulfillment, as described by Jesus and the New Testament writers.

Matt. 12:40 _____

John 19:36 _____

John 3:14, 15 _____

Rom. 5:14 _____

John 1:29 _____

In each case, Jesus and the New Testament writers apply the type and antitype interpretation that allow the prophetic significance to stand out. In this way, they point to a greater fulfillment of the historical reality.

Think about the earthly sanctuary service, which functioned as a type of the *entire* plan of salvation. What does this teach us about the importance of the sanctuary message for us today?

Further Thought: Read Clifford Goldstein, *1844 Made Simple* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1988) as one place, of many, to find more material on the 2,300-day prophecy. See also 1844madesimple.org.

Study this chart below:

Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon (lion)	_____
Media-Persia (bear)	Media-Persia (ram)
Greece (leopard)	Greece (he-goat)
Pagan Rome (fourth beast)	Pagan Rome (horn moves horizontally)
Papal Rome (little horn)	Papal Rome (horn moves vertically)
Judgment in heaven	Cleansing of heavenly sanctuary

The crucial point to see here is that the judgment scene in Daniel 7, which occurs after 1,260 years of persecution (*Dan. 7:25*), is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14. And this judgment scene in heaven is what leads, ultimately, to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom at the end of this fallen earth's sad history. Hence, we have powerful biblical evidence for the great importance that Scripture places on Daniel 8:14 and the event it signifies.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back and review Daniel 2. See how clearly the historicist method is revealed here: an unbroken sequence of world empires, starting in antiquity and ending with the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. God gives us the key to interpreting these prophecies. What does it say, though, about the state of the Christian world that very few Christians today employ the historicist method anymore? Why does this fact help establish even more the pertinence of the Adventist message for the world at this time?
- 2 How well do you understand the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14? If you don't understand it, why not take the time to learn it and to share it with your class? You might be surprised at how solidly grounded our interpretation of that prophecy really is.
- 3 Read Daniel 7:18, 21, 22, 25, 27. Notice the focus on what happens to the saints. What does the little-horn power do to them? In contrast, what does the Lord do for them? What is the good news for the saints in regard to the judgment? What does the judgment ultimately give to them?

Running for God

By MARIAN KAZMIERCZAK

Running brought me to church in Poland. As a young man, I started body-building because the doctor cautioned me to take measures to improve my health. Then I got into long-distance running. I loved it! I ran marathons, 62-mile (100-kilometer) races, and even a 24-hour run over 126 miles (203 kilometers). I joined a group of runners who trained together several times a week.

After a while, I noticed that Piotr, a runner in our group, missed our training sessions every Saturday. I couldn't understand why, and I finally asked him. "I've been thinking about the meaning of life," Piotr replied. "I've been reading the Bible, and I've been going to several churches to find one that follows the Bible. Now I've found such a church. Would you like to study the Bible with us?"

The Bible studies, led by a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, confused me. I considered myself to be a devout Christian, and I belonged to another denomination.

One day while we were running, Piotr shocked me with a question. "Did you know that your clergy aren't telling you the truth?" he said.

"Now you have gone too far!" I exclaimed. "You're mixed up."

"The next time we meet, I'll bring a Bible," Piotr said. "You bring your church's book of doctrines. We'll see where the truth lies."

The proposal seemed good to me. I had always tried to live a truthful life and to follow the truth that I knew. At our next meeting, Piotr and I compared the two books. I was stunned to realize that my book didn't match the teachings of the Bible. Several months later, I was baptized. I was 45.

It felt good to join a church whose members cared about their health. Soon I noticed that several church members didn't eat meat. I researched the plant-based diet and also quit eating meat. Before, I saw my body as my own and exploited it for my own desires. Now I understand that my body is not my own. I try not to damage it. It is God's temple.

Today I am 71, and running remains a major part of my life, although I have stopped training and competing on Sabbath. Running is an ideal way to spread the gospel. After a marathon, everyone feels good about their accomplishments, and it is easy to talk about God. I share who gives me strength to run at my age.



I run at least three times a week, six miles (10 kilometers) each time. It takes me about 55 minutes. I run in forests and in nature. I think about my life and think about God. I hum hymns and remember Bible verses. I pray for God to bring someone into my path so I can talk about Him. He brings people to me.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2017 that helped build a television studio for Hope Channel in Poland, broadcasting the gospel to the Polish-speaking world.

Key Texts: *Dan. 2:27–45, John 14:29, Num. 14:34, Dan. 7:1–25, Dan. 8:14, 1 Cor. 10:1–13.*

Part I: Overview

The revival of the Protestant Reformation came as a direct result of studying the stirring prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and the rediscovery of the historicist method of interpretation, derived from *sola Scriptura*. In fact, the internal way in which Daniel and John interpreted the prophecies became the key for Protestant Bible study. The historicist method views prophecy as a progressive and continuous fulfillment over time. This view led men such as Wycliffe, Luther, Zwingli, Knox, and others to identify the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 and the beast that rises out of the sea, as depicted in Revelation 13, as the Roman Catholic Church, the papal power. The groundswell of reform had an enormous influence in Europe, as people came out of the Dark Ages. This groundswell was followed by the Inquisition and massive persecution. Many of the Reformers fled to the peaceful shores of the New World, where they were able to worship God in spirit and in truth (*see Rev. 12:13–17*).

Today the Bible remains unique when compared to other religious literature of the world in that 30 percent of its contents are prophetic in nature. Biblical prophecy provides an internal and external mechanism to confirm the accuracy of God's Word. Prophecy pointing to the hope of the coming Messiah, the Second Coming, keeps the church looking forward with anticipation. It provides a sense and urgency of mission, for if Jesus is coming soon, it calls believers to prepare the world for His great Advent. This week we will study the pillars of historicist prophetic interpretation that provide the identity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

Far removed from the Inquisitors in Europe, American Protestants established the first major universities—Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—to train their ministers. For more than a century and a half, the presidents and professors of these institutions produced major works outlining the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation from a historicist perspective. But

Rome was not idle. Catholic scholars in the Counter Reformation reacted to the Protestants with new interpretations that deflected the attention away from the papacy.

Preterism was developed by the Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Alcazar (1554–1613), who interpreted prophecies in the Bible as simply communicating events that happened in the past. Preterists largely denied the possibility of *predictive* prophecy. De Alcazar projected the antichrist power into the past, identifying it with the Roman Emperor Nero.

Another Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537–1591), published a 500-page commentary on the book of Revelation, teaching that the majority of prophecy was to be fulfilled at the very end of time in a brief three-and-a-half-year period. *Futurism* went the opposite direction from that of de Alcazar, placing the emphasis of prophecy far into the future and leaving the papal church of the Middle Ages outside of the prophetic time frame altogether.

Neither of these views had much influence at the beginning. Two developments changed this fortunate fact. The historical-critical approach to Scripture in the eighteenth century claimed to remove the possibility of predictive prophecy, adopting some tenets of the preterist position. This view is now the prevailing one, widely held by higher-critical scholars, both from Catholic and Protestant traditions. Meanwhile, more conservative Christians were heavily influenced by the Scofield Reference Bible (1906), leading a large majority today to accept a futurist (dispensationalist) view that envisions a secret rapture, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and a millennium before Christ's second coming. Seventh-day Adventists alone remain a remnant among Protestants to uphold the historicist method. How did the prophets of Scripture use this method?

Scripture

Daniel interpreted the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 and the symbols of chapters 7 and 8 as a series of empires appearing one after another in a continuous sequence. He specifically told Nebuchadnezzar that he, as representing Babylon, was the head of gold (*Dan. 2:38*). The next three kingdoms occur in succession as parts of the body connected to each other. These parts are composed of various metals, which distinguish them from one another, but they are connected by the bodied image in descending order. The second and third kingdoms after Babylon are specifically identified by the angel Gabriel as "the kings of Media and Persia" (*Dan. 8:20, NKJV*) and the "kingdom of Greece" (*Dan. 8:21, NKJV*). Clearly, the legs of iron, which come next, are to be identified with Rome, as the course of history has demonstrated. The continuation of the iron into the toes, though mixed with clay, indicates the continuation of the Roman power. Each successive vision expands with greater detail those things to come "in the latter days" (*Dan. 2:28*). Daniel 7 and 8 place

increasing focus on the little-horn power. The recapitulation, expansion, and enlargement of detail continues in Daniel 11, in which the papacy becomes the predominant focal point. This focus on the papacy is appropriate when we see that the major force to be reckoned with in the 1,260 day/year prophecy must be, and can only be, the papacy up until the deadly wound in 1798, and then beyond. This interpretation connects us with the powers that John spoke of prophetically in Revelation 12, 13, and 17.

In Revelation 13, the beast power that rises up out of the sea mirrors the actions of the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8. He reigns for the same period of forty-two months (*Rev. 13:5*), or 1260 years. He blasphemes God's name and His tabernacle (*Rev. 13:6*). He kills by the sword and makes war with the saints (*Rev. 13:10*). He will be worshiped (*Rev. 13:8*). These descriptions are fulfilled in the papacy. But God protected the woman, His church, from the serpent-induced power of the beast that rises up out of the sea, and the earth "swallowed up the flood" (*Rev. 12:16*).

Preterism redates the prophet Daniel to the second century, *after* Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece come on the scene. Further, preterism reinterprets the little-horn power as a Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. (Futurism also tends to interpret the little horn as Antiochus IV but then suggests a future antichrist to appear at the end of time.) But this identification does not fit, for several reasons. (1) *The Origin of the Little Horn*. The little horn came "out of one of them" (*Dan. 8:9*). Preterists argue that the little horn came out of one of the four horns (the generals Lysimachus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Seleucus and their successors as heads of the four Macedonian kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided). But the grammatical, contextual, and syntactical evidence points to the conclusion that the little horn came out of one of "the four winds" or compass points, an expression that immediately precedes the phrase. (2) *The Progression of Power in Kingdoms*. The Medo-Persian ram "magnified himself" (*Dan. 8:4, RSV*), the Greek he-goat "magnified himself exceedingly" (*Dan. 8:8, RSV*), the little horn "magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the host" (*Dan. 8:10, 11, RSV*). But this magnification of power cannot be attributed to a single, weak ruler such as Antiochus IV. (3) *The Placement of Order*. Antiochus IV ruled in the middle of the Seleucid dynasty, the seventh in a series of twenty-seven kings. The little-horn power appears "at the latter end of their rule" (*Dan. 8:23, RSV*). Rome appears at the latter part of the Greek Empire, but Antiochus IV does not. (4) *The Direction of Conquest*. The little-horn power was to conquer toward the east, the south, and toward "the Beautiful Land" (*Dan. 8:9, NASB*); that is, from the direction of the west. But Antiochus IV was responsible for losing Judea, the "Beautiful Land," not conquering it, and he had only limited

success in the south (Egypt). (5) *The Abomination of Desolation*. Scholars believe that Antiochus IV caused the desolation of the sanctuary, but Jesus, quoting from Daniel, refers to this desolation as still in the future in His day (*Matt. 24:15*), and Antiochus IV already had been dead for two centuries. (6) *The Evening/Morning “Days.”* The 2,300 evening-mornings are interpreted as the sacrifices that ceased during Antiochus IV’s desecration of the temple. Thus, to accommodate the Antiochus interpretation, the number is reduced to 1,150 literal days. But the phrase ‘*ereb bōqer*’ is very similar to the designation used in Genesis 1 to refer to the 24-hour day. The morning and evening sacrifices associated with the earthly sanctuary are referred to in a different order, however; thus, the desolation mentioned in Daniel 8:13 does not refer to the stopping of the earthly sanctuary services during the time of Antiochus. (7) *The Prophetic Close of the Prophecy*. The close relation between Daniel 2 and 7 indicates that there is a glorious conclusion. But if Judas Maccabeus, the Jew, defeated Antiochus IV, how does Judas come in the clouds of heaven, like the Son of man (*Dan. 7:13*), and how is his kingdom eternal (*Dan. 7:14*)? (Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: The Church and the Last Things* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016], pp. 713–717). Neither the preterist nor the futurist interpretation matches the criteria in the text or the testimony of Jesus. Thus, for these reasons, and others, the Antiochus interpretation for Daniel 8 is untenable. It is only the historicist interpretation of prophecy that identifies accurately the last 2,600 years of history in prophetic, sequential perspective.

Part III: Life Application

Why do these details matter to us in the twenty-first century? In examining some of the challenges posed to the historicist model of prophetic interpretation, we must admit that when we use Scripture to interpret Scripture and allow the prophets Daniel and John to speak on these matters, we must conclude with the Reformers that the little-horn power came out of the fourth beast (*Daniel 7*) from the western direction of the four winds (*Daniel 8*) and ruled for 1,260 years, shortly before Christ’s entering into the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. John refers to this same power as the beast that rises up out of the sea (*Rev. 13:1–10*). There is only one entity that fits the criteria of Scripture and history: papal Rome. We also must recognize that the other two main methods of interpretation—preterism and futurism—originated in Rome with the primary objective to throw off the Protestant interpretation during the Counter Reformation. This fact raises serious questions about

current mainline Protestant churches that have adopted these Catholic models. Certainly, this situation points to the fulfillment of our mission and message to proclaim the three angels' messages, calling God's people out of the confusion of Babylon while there is still time in earth's history. Ask your class these questions:

1. **How have the Protestant churches changed today? In what ways did the historicist position protect them from the errors taught by the Catholic Church, and how has that protection effectively been removed?**

2. **What are some ways that you can share the unique message of the “everlasting gospel” embodied in the three angels’ messages with “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV*)?**

Dealing With Difficult Passages



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Tim. 2:10–15, 1 Chron. 29:17, James 4:6–10, Gal. 6:9, Acts 17:11.*

Memory Text: “And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (*2 Peter 3:15, 16, NKJV*).

When discussing the apostle Paul's letters, Peter writes that in them, and in some other places in Scripture, there are “some things hard to understand” (*2 Pet. 3:16, NKJV*). These words are twisted or distorted by “ignorant and unstable people” (*2 Pet. 3:16, NIV*) to their own destruction. Peter does not say that all things are difficult to understand—but only that some are.

And we know that, don't we? What honest reader of the Bible hasn't come across texts that seem strange and difficult to understand? Certainly, at some point or another, we've all had this experience.

That's why we will take a look this week, not so much at difficult texts per se, but at what might be the reasons for these challenges and how, as faithful seekers of truth from the Word of God, we can work through them. In the end, some of these challenging statements might never be solved this side of heaven. At the same time, the vast majority of texts in the Bible present no difficulty whatsoever, and there's no need to allow the small number of difficult ones to weaken our trust in the reliability and authority of God's Word as a whole.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 20.

Possible Reasons for Apparent Contradictions

Read 2 Timothy 2:10–15. Paul admonishes Timothy to be diligent and to be “accurately handling the word of truth” (NASB). What important message is he giving to all of us here?

No thoughtful and honest student of Scripture will deny the fact that there are things in the Bible that are difficult to understand. This situation should not disturb us. In fact, in a sense those difficulties are to be expected. After all, we are imperfect and finite beings, and no person has a comprehensive knowledge of every area of learning, let alone of divine things. Hence, when ignorant and finite human beings try to understand the wisdom of the infinite God of Scripture, there is bound to be some difficulty. Such difficulty in understanding biblical teachings, however, does not in any way prove that what the Bible affirms is untrue.

Those who dismiss the biblical teaching of divine revelation and inspiration often declare those difficulties to be contradictions and errors. Because for them the Bible is more or less just a human book, they believe that the Bible must contain imperfections and errors. With such a mind-set, there is often no serious attempt to look for an explanation that takes into consideration the unity and trustworthiness of Scripture that results from its divine inspiration. People who start to question the first pages of Scripture, the Creation account (for instance), may soon be led to cast into doubt and uncertainty much of the rest of Scripture, as well.

Some discrepancies in Scripture might be due to minor errors of copyists or translators. Ellen G. White has stated: “Some look to us gravely and say, ‘Don’t you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?’ This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God’s utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 16.

Why is it so important that we approach the Bible in a spirit of humility and submission?

Deal With Difficulties Honestly and Carefully

Have you ever had the experience of coming across a text or set of texts that you didn't understand, or found difficult to harmonize with other texts or reality in general? It's hard to imagine that at some time or another you haven't faced this problem. The question is, How did you respond? Or, even more important, *How should you respond?*

Read 1 Chronicles 29:17, Proverbs 2:7, 1 Timothy 4:16. What are these texts saying that can apply to the question of how we deal with difficult passages?

Only when we are honest can we face difficulties adequately. Honesty safeguards us so that we do not evade any difficulties or try to obscure them. Honesty also will restrain us from giving superficial answers that do not really bear the test of scrutiny. God is pleased with honesty and integrity. Therefore, we should emulate His character in all we do, even in our study of the Bible.

Honest people will deal with Bible difficulties in such a way that they are careful not to present information out of context, distort the truth with loaded language, or mislead others by means of manipulating evidence. It is far better to wait for a sustainable answer for a difficulty than to attempt to provide an evasive or unsatisfactory solution. A positive side effect of being honest in our Bible study is that it builds trust, and trust is at the core of all healthy personal relationships. It convinces people much more than flimsy answers. It is better to say that you just don't know how to answer the question or accurately explain the text, than to try to make it say what you want it to say when, perhaps, it really doesn't.

Careful people earnestly want to know the truth of God's Word and, therefore, consistently make sure that they do not rush to hasty conclusions that are based on limited knowledge or flimsy evidence. Careful people are determined not to overlook any aspect or detail that could be important. They are not hurried in their thinking, but thorough and diligent in their study of the Word of God and all related information.

What do you do, or what should you do, with texts that you don't fully understand or that don't seem to fit with your understanding of truth?

Deal With Difficulties Humbly

Read James 4:6–10, 2 Chronicles 7:14, and Zephaniah 3:12. Why is humility important when we try to tackle difficult passages in Scripture?

Many people have come to the amazing realization and humbling insight that they are dependent upon something and someone outside of themselves. They have realized that they are not the measure of all things. These people value truth over their ego's need to be right, and they are aware that truth is not of their own making but, rather, what they confront. Perhaps the greatest truth that these people understand is just how little they really know of truth. They know, as Paul wrote, that they "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

The benefits of this humility in thinking are manifold: the habit of humble inquiry is the foundation of all growth in knowledge, for it generates a freedom that naturally produces a teachable spirit. This does not mean that humble people are often necessarily wrong, or that they will always change their minds and will never have a firm conviction. It means only that they are submissive to biblical truth. They are aware of the limitations of their knowledge and, therefore, are capable of expanding their knowledge and understanding of God's Word in a way that the intellectual person, arrogant and proud, won't do.

"All who will come to the Word of God for guidance, with humble, inquiring minds, determined to know the terms of salvation, will understand what saith the Scripture. But those who bring to the investigation of the Word a spirit, which it does not approve, will take away from the search a spirit which it has not imparted. The Lord will not speak to a mind that is unconcerned. He wastes not his instruction on one who is willingly irreverent or polluted. But the tempter educates every mind that yields itself to his suggestions and is willing to make of none effect God's holy law.

"We need to humble our hearts, and with sincerity and reverence search the Word of life; for that mind alone that is humble and contrite can see light."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 22, 1907.

How do you strike the right balance between humility and certainty? For example, how would you answer the charge, *How can you Seventh-day Adventists be so certain that you are right about the Sabbath and that almost everyone else is wrong?*

Determination and Patience

Read Galatians 6:9. While Paul speaks here about our persistence in doing good to others, the same attitude is necessary when we deal with difficult questions. Why are determination and patience important in solving problems?

Real achievement always requires tenacity. What we obtain too easily we often esteem too lightly. The difficulties in the Bible give us an opportunity to set our brains to work, and the determination and persistence with which we pursue a solution reveals how important the issue is for us. Any time that we spend studying the Bible to try to find out more about its meaning and message is time well spent. Perhaps the experience of diligently searching the Scriptures for an answer, even for a long time, will be a greater blessing than the solution to the problem if we eventually do find it. After all, when we find a solution to a vexing problem, it becomes very precious to us.

The fact that you cannot solve a difficulty quickly does not prove that it cannot be solved. It is remarkable how often we overlook this evident fact. There are many who, when they meet a difficulty in the Bible, and give it a little thought and can see no possible solution, at once jump to the conclusion that the problem cannot be solved. Some start questioning the trustworthiness of the Bible altogether. But we should not forget that there may be a very easy solution even if we in our limited human wisdom—or ignorance—don't see it. What would we think of a beginner in algebra who, having tried in vain for half an hour to solve a difficult problem, declares that there is no possible solution to the problem because he could find none? The same is true for us in our study of the Bible.

When some difficulties defy even your strongest efforts to solve them, lay them aside for a while, and in the meantime, practice what God has clearly shown to you. Some spiritual insights are gained only after we have been willing to follow what God has already told us to do. So, be persistent and patient in your study of the Bible. After all, patience is a virtue of the believers at the end of time (*see Rev. 14:12*).

What can we learn from other people who have diligently and patiently studied challenging Bible passages? How can we encourage others not to give up their search for truth? Why don't we have to be afraid when we come across a difficult passage in Scripture?

Deal With Difficulties Scripturally and Prayerfully

Read Acts 17:11; Acts 8:35; and Acts 15:15, 16. What did the apostles and members of the early church do when they were confronted with difficult questions? Why is Scripture still the best source for its own interpretation?

The best solution to Bible difficulties is still found in the Bible itself. Bible problems are best dealt with when they are studied in the light of all Scripture instead of just dealing with a single text in isolation from others or from the whole of Scripture. We must, indeed, use the Bible to help us understand the Bible. Learning to mine the great truths found in Scripture is one of the most important things we can do.

If you do not understand a passage of Scripture, try to gather some light from other biblical passages that deal with the same subject. Always try to find clear statements of Scripture to shed light on those passages that are less clear. It also is very important never to darken and cloud clear statements of Scripture by bringing to them difficult-to-understand passages. Rather than having extra-biblical sources or philosophy or science explain the meaning of the Bible, we should allow the text of Scripture itself to unfold its meaning to us.

It has been said that on our knees we literally look at difficulties from a new perspective. For in prayer, we signal that we are in need of divine help in interpreting and understanding Scripture. In prayer, we seek the illumination of our minds through the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical writers to write what they wrote.

In prayer, our motives are laid open, and we can tell God why we want to understand what we read. In prayer, we ask God to open our eyes to His Word and to give us a willing spirit to follow and practice His truth. (This is crucial!) When God guides us through His Holy Spirit in response to our prayers, He does not contradict what He has revealed in the Bible. God will always be in harmony with the Bible, and confirm and build upon what He has inspired the biblical writers to communicate to us.

How does prayer help you get into the right frame of mind to be able to understand and obey the Word of God better?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “What to Do With Doubt?” pp. 105–113, in *Steps to Christ*. Read section 8 in the document “Methods of Bible Study,” which can be found at <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study>.

In the Bible are many mysteries that finite human beings find difficult to comprehend and that are too deep for us to explain fully. This is why we need a humble mind, and should be willing to learn prayerfully from Scripture. Faithfulness to Scripture allows the biblical text—even though its meaning goes against our grain—to say what it actually says. Faithfulness to Scripture will respect the text rather than alter the text (yes, some actually change the texts themselves) or evade its true meaning.

“When the word of God is opened without reverence and without prayer; when the thoughts and affections are not fixed upon God, or in harmony with His will, the mind is clouded with doubts; and in the very study of the Bible, skepticism strengthens. The enemy takes control of the thoughts, and he suggests interpretations that are not correct. Whenever men are not in word and deed seeking to be in harmony with God, then, however learned they may be, they are liable to err in their understanding of Scripture, and it is not safe to trust to their explanations. Those who look to the Scriptures to find discrepancies, have not spiritual insight. With distorted vision they will see many causes for doubt and unbelief in things that are really plain and simple.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 110, 111.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why are the attitudes toward the Bible that we discussed this week so foundational for a proper understanding of Scripture? What other attitudes toward the Bible do you believe are crucial in helping you better understand it?
- ❷ Why should we not be surprised to find things in the Bible that are hard to explain and understand? After all, how many things of the natural world itself are at times hard to understand? To this day, for instance, water (*water!*) is filled with mysteries.
- ❸ As Adventists, how can we answer the question of Luke 23:43, where (according to most translations) Jesus is telling the thief that he will be in heaven with Jesus on that day? What are honest ways to respond? How, for instance, can texts such as John 20:17, Ecclesiastes 9:5, and 1 Corinthians 15:16–20 help us understand the issue in question here?

Factory Turned Into School

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A prosperous Seventh-day Adventist businessman wondered how his wealth could be used to improve his hometown, Tiachiv, in western Ukraine.

He bought several thousand copies of Ellen G. White's *Steps to Christ* and distributed them to every home in the town of 9,000 people. Then he did the same with *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*. The local Adventist church enjoyed a good local reputation, and its membership grew to 70.

But the businessman, Stepan Dordyai, thought, *What else can I do?*

One day, he mentioned his conundrum to Vladimir Tkachuk, then education director for the Adventist Church's Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine and much of the former Soviet Union. "Schools are one of the best ways to reach the world these days," Tkachuk replied.

The businessman gazed steadily at Tkachuk. "I have a building," he said. "That's exactly what I want to do."

In just three months, Dordyai transformed a factory building into an attractive three-story school with a beautiful sports field. The Happy Place Seventh-day Adventist School opened its doors to 36 children in September 2016.

In just a year, enrollment at the school, which teaches grades 1–4 and has a preschool, had doubled to 70 children, filling the classrooms to capacity.

The sports field is one of the finest in town, and other schools send their children to participate in friendly matches. Each time children arrive, the Adventist principal announces, "This is a special school. We study the Bible here and do not curse. So, before we play, would you like to memorize a short Bible verse?"

The children respond with a loud cry, "Yes!" On a recent day, the children eagerly memorized John 10:10, where Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (*NKJV*).

"The children quickly learned it and then repeated it," said Tkachuk, who was present and recounted the events surrounding the school. "Then they played."

Forty-five miles (75 kilometers) away, a much larger Adventist church of 300 members saw the flourishing school and asked one another, "Why can't we open a school?" So, they opened a school with 22 children in their town, Ilnytsya. This is a remarkable story that is unfolding across the Euro-Asia Division, where the number of church schools has surged from 14 in 2012 to more than 60 today. "There are many reasons why schools are opening quickly now, but one of the main reasons is it is the right time and the right place for God to fulfill His plans," said Mikhail Kaminskiy, president of the Euro-Asia Division.

A Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2021 will help expand several church schools in the Euro-Asia Division. Thank you for allowing God to use you to spread the gospel.

Key Texts: *2 Pet. 3:15, 16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Chron. 29:17; Prov. 2:7; James 4:6; Gal. 6:9.*

Part I: Overview

At some point, every student of the Bible has encountered some passages of Scripture that are challenging to understand. This difficulty should not surprise us. Any of us who are confronted with another culture and worldview know that, inevitably, there will be things we do not understand right away, because such things are foreign to us. The same holds true for the worldview of Scripture. If we understood everything in Scripture, there would be no need to gain new insights, and there would be less incentive to grow in spiritual knowledge. How we approach difficult passages not only reveals much about our attitude about Scripture, but it also shows how serious we are in our search for answers. The amount of time and mental energy we invest in dealing with difficulties, trying to find solutions that are faithful to Scripture, reveals how important Scripture is to us and how important finding answers is to us. Difficult passages not only challenge us but they also provide a unique opportunity to dig deeper and to search the Scriptures more thoroughly so that we can understand the Bible writers and God's message even more fully. We do not need to be afraid of encountering things in Scripture that we do not understand. In fact, we can be grateful even for challenging and difficult passages in the Bible, because they provide an opportunity to grow in our understanding. There are some important attitudes that will influence whether those difficulties will become a blessing or a curse for us.

Part II: Commentary

Possible Reasons for Difficulties and Apparent Contradictions

Many scholars who do not believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture assume that Scripture is contradictory and full of mistakes, because in their view, to be human means to be fallible and imperfect. While it is true that human beings are fallible and not always truthful, it also is a fact that even fallible human beings are fully capable of discerning and speaking the truth. If even fallible beings are capable of communicating truth faithfully, how much more should we expect God, for whom it is impossible

to lie (*Heb. 6:18*), to be able to prevent the Bible writers from misleading us in what they write.

When people approach Scripture with methodological doubt, they will accept its truthfulness only when there is indubitable evidence and proof for its correctness. Rather than granting Scripture the benefit of the doubt when we do not have all the information available, many critical scholars only accept those passages as trustworthy and true where human reason has demonstrated their correctness or where external evidence has clearly revealed that Scripture is in harmony with archaeological or scientific findings. If these external criteria are the final norm for what is acceptable, and Scripture sometimes does not live up to them, such interpreters think they have found contradictions.

In dealing with biblical statements, we need to remember that the Bible writers frequently used nontechnical, ordinary, everyday language to describe things. For example, they spoke of sunrise (*Num. 2:3, Josh. 19:12*) and sunset (*Deut. 11:30, Dan. 6:14*) (i.e., they used the language of appearance rather than scientific language). Furthermore, one must not confuse a social convention with a scientific affirmation. The need for technical precision varies according to the situation in which a statement is made. Therefore, imprecision is not the same as untruthfulness.

Some discrepancies might be due to minor variations and errors caused by copyists and translators of the Bible. Most of those transmissional errors are unintentional changes, where copyists confused similar letters or, when copying a text, the copyist accidentally “skips ahead to another word or line with the same word or letter. This tendency is compounded when there are no spaces between words or punctuation marks, which certainly was the case for Greek texts and may have been true of Hebrew as well.”—Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 46. Sometimes a reversal in the order of two letters or words occurs. For example, in John 1:42 the name “John” [*Iōannou*], as found in several manuscripts, is read “Jonah” [*Iōna*] in some other manuscripts (see Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, p. 48, for this and other examples). Such problems should not distress us. First of all, the biblical manuscripts are by far the most reliable and best-preserved manuscripts of the ancient world. No other literature is transmitted in so many manuscripts and is copied so meticulously in reference to the original composition as are the biblical manuscripts. Second, those minor changes can be corrected in light of the other evidence that is available. They do not affect any major doctrine or teaching of the Bible. While copyists and translators generally have been extremely careful in their work, they were not inspired as were the original biblical authors. Ellen G. White was aware that there “might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators.” But for her, all those “mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest

revealed truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 16.

Deal With Difficulties Honestly and Carefully

God is pleased with honesty (*1 Chron. 29:17*). If we honestly seek the truth, we will find it. Honesty will win in the long run. Dealing with difficulties honestly means that we do not deny them or distort the evidence but deal with them in an unbiased way. It is far better to admit honestly that we do not have a satisfactory answer to a difficulty than to bend the evidence in order to make it more palatable to our liking. Shallow answers will not stand the test of scrutiny and will cast a shadow over our credibility. A pious lie is perhaps the most destructive lie of all, because it casts a dark shadow on the character of God and His Word and will call into question even our own integrity. If we ignore honesty in our search for answers, we will kill our conscience and endanger our spiritual life. Eventually we will be in danger of not valuing truth at all. Perhaps in the end, we might even be unable to distinguish truth from falsehood. But honesty brings a blessing in its wake—it builds trust with the very people whom we want to win for the truth of the Bible. Honesty is the foundation of all healthy personal relationships. Our honesty should be coupled with carefulness. Honesty can wait and will not rush to hasty conclusions that are based on limited information. Honesty will do everything needed to carefully evaluate the evidence that is available.

Can you think of examples of dishonest answers about the Bible and the negative (long-term) impact these have had on others? Can you think of situations where honest answers to biblical questions have had a positive (long-term) impact on those who heard them?

Deal With Difficulties Humbly

Humility is the opposite of pride. Pride prevents us from appreciating the insights and achievements of others. Pride does not need to learn, because pride thinks it knows everything already. Humility, on the other hand, acknowledges that truth is not something of one's own making but is God-breathed (*see 2 Tim. 3:16*). Humble people have a teachable spirit and do not claim to have all the answers. They are capable of expanding their knowledge of God's Word in a way that arrogant and proud people are incapable of doing. Because pride is so deeply seated in all of us and humility goes against the grain of our culture and society, a posture of humility is perhaps the most difficult attitude of Bible study to assume.

Do you know anyone who has a genuinely humble intellectual character? Who is it? What impresses you the most about his or her life and scholarship?

Reflect on the following statement by Ellen G. White on this subject:

“Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 255.

Deal With Difficulties With Determination and Patience

Some difficulties defy easy and quick answers. They require determination and patience. For centuries, scholars had been puzzled over one of the most perplexing discrepancies in Scripture: the disparate numbers of the reigns of the Hebrew kings in the Old Testament. The Bible provides much information about these kings, but when the information is put together, it seems contradictory. It would have been easy for Adventist scholar Edwin Thiele to accept this unsolved discrepancy as a given. But because he believed in the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture, he was determined not to give up and for years studied all the evidence. By carefully studying the biblical data and comparing it with extrabiblical sources, he finally was able to show that different methods were used to count the years in the reigns of the Hebrew kings. His solution is consistent with the scriptural record and the records of other nations of the ancient world. His book *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983) has become a standard work that is widely recognized in scholarly circles, far beyond the borders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Part III: Life Application

Many so-called mistakes are not the result of God’s revelation but are the result of our misinterpretations. They arise not from any obscurity of the Bible but from the blindness and prejudice of the interpreter. Yet, there are some biblical difficulties that defy quick solutions. They are difficult to understand, even for the most honest and determined person. But just because I have not found a solution to a particular problem does not mean that there is no solution at all. It is quite likely that other careful students of Scripture have wrestled with the same difficulty long before I did, and probably there is an answer, even if I am not aware of it.

But we also can experience what Daniel experienced when he was confronted with passages of Scripture that he did not understand (*see Dan. 8:27, 9:20–23*). He prayed (*see Dan. 9:1–19*). When we are on our knees, we may gain a completely new perspective on some problems.

In what situations has prayer made a difference in your life when dealing

with some difficult questions? Share your experience with others.

For further principles and specific examples on how to deal with difficult passages, see Gerhard Pfandl (ed.), *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, Biblical Research Institute Studies 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010).

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Living *by the* Word of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 2:12–16; Luke 4:4, 8, 10–12; Ps. 37:7; Ps. 46:10; Ps. 62:1, 2, 5; Col. 3:16.*

Memory Text: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (*James 1:22, NKJV*).

The best method of studying the Bible is of no use if we are not determined to live by what we learn from Scripture. What is true for education in general also is true for studying the Bible in particular: you learn best not just by reading or hearing, but by practicing what you know. This obedience opens a full treasure house of divine blessings that otherwise would be closed to us, and it leads us on an exciting and life-transforming way to increase our understanding and knowledge. If we are not willing to abide by the Word of God and are not willing to practice what we have studied, we will not grow. And our witness will be impaired because our life is out of harmony with our words.

We grow in grace and wisdom through inspiring models who illustrate to us what it means to live by the Word of God. There is no better example and no motivational force more powerful than Jesus Christ. He gave us a pattern to follow. He lived a life in full harmony with the will of God.

This week, we will study what it means to live by the Word of God and under its divine authority.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 27.

The Living Word of God and the Holy Spirit

To study the Word of God carefully and with the proper method is very important. But, just as important, perhaps even more so, is that we put into practice what we have learned. The ultimate goal of studying the Bible lies not in acquiring greater knowledge, as wonderful as that can be. The goal is not about our mastering of the Word of God but about the Word of God mastering us, changing our lives and our way of thinking. That is what really matters. To be willing to live the truth that we have learned means to be willing to submit to that biblical truth. This choice sometimes involves an intense struggle, because we are fighting a battle over who will have the supremacy in our thinking and in our life. And, in the end, there are only two sides from which to pick.

Read Philippians 2:12–16. What are these verses saying about how we should live?

Yes, God works in us, but He does so through the Holy Spirit, who alone gives us the wisdom to understand the Holy Scriptures. Furthermore, as sinful human beings, we often are opposed to God's truth, and left to our own devices, we would not obey the Word of God (*Rom. 1:25; Eph. 4:17, 18*). Without the Holy Spirit, there is no affection for God's message. There is no hope, no trust, no love in response. Through the Holy Spirit, God indeed "works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (*Phil. 2:13, NKJV*).

The Holy Spirit is a Teacher who desires to lead us into a deeper understanding of Scripture and to a joyful appreciation of the Word of God. He brings the truth of God's Word to our attention and gives us fresh insights into those truths, so that our lives are characterized by faithfulness and a loving obedience to the will of God. "No one is able to explain the Scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit. But when you take up the Word of God with a humble, teachable heart, the angels of God will be by your side to impress you with evidences of the truth."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 411. In this way, spiritual things are interpreted spiritually (*1 Cor. 2:13, 14*), and we are able joyfully to follow God's Word "morning by morning" (*Isa. 50:4, 5*).

Philippians 2:16 says that we should hold "fast the word of life" (NKJV). What do you think that means? And how do we do that? See also Deuteronomy 4:4, which teaches something similar. What is our role in this whole process?

Learning From Jesus

There is no better and more inspiring example to follow than Jesus Christ. He was familiar with the Scriptures, and was willing to follow the written Word of God and abide by it.

Read Luke 4:4, 8, 10–12. How does Jesus use Scripture to counter Satan’s temptations? What does this tell us about how central the Scriptures must be to our faith, especially in times of temptation?

Jesus knew the Scriptures well. He was so intimately familiar with the Word of God that He could quote it by heart. This familiarity with God’s written Word must have resulted from precious quality time with God in studying the Scriptures.

If He had not known the exact words of Scripture and the context in which they appear, He could easily have been deceived by the devil. Even the devil quoted Scripture and used it for his own deceptive purposes. Thus, just being able to quote Scripture, as the devil did, is not enough. One also needs to know what else Scripture has to say on a subject and know its correct meaning. Only such familiarity with God’s Word will help us, like Jesus, not to be fooled by God’s adversary but to be able to resist the attacks of Satan. Time and again we read about Jesus opening the minds of His followers to understand Scripture by referring them to what “is written” (*Luke 24:45, 46; Matt. 11:10; John 6:45; etc.*). He assumed that those who read the Scriptures can come to a correct understanding of its meaning: “ ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ ” (*Luke 10:26, NKJV*). For Jesus, what was written in Scripture is the norm that we should live by.

In John 7:38, Jesus—the Word of God made flesh—referred His followers back to what Scripture said. It is only through the Bible that we know that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It is the Scriptures that testify about Him (*John 5:39*). Jesus Himself was willing to abide by the Scriptures, the Word of God committed to writing. If He was willing to do that, what does this tell us about what we should do, as well?

What has been your own experience with using the Scriptures in your battle with temptation? That is, when tempted, did you start reading the Bible or quote Scripture? What happened as a result, and what have you learned from that experience?

Jesus Versus Scripture?

Read John 5:45–47. What powerful message does Jesus give us here about His relationship to the Bible?

Some people claim that when Jesus spoke He put His words in stark contrast to the words of Scripture, as we find them in the Old Testament. They say that the words of Jesus are even elevated above the words of Scripture.

In the New Testament, we read that Jesus said: “ ‘You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you . . . ’ ” (*Matt. 5:43, 44; compare with Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34, 38, 39*). When Jesus said these famous words in the Sermon on the Mount, He was not trying to abandon or abolish the Old Testament, as some interpreters claim. Instead, He responded to various interpretations of Scripture and to oral traditions that were used by some interpreters of His day to justify behavior toward other people that God did not condone and never commanded, like hating your enemy (*see Matt. 5:43*).

Jesus did not abolish the Old Testament in any way or in any degree lessen its authority. The opposite is true. It was the Old Testament that, indeed, proves who He is. Instead, He intensified the meaning of the Old Testament statements by pointing us to God’s original intentions.

To use Jesus’ authority to disqualify Holy Scripture or to denigrate some parts of the Bible as uninspired is perhaps one of the subtlest, and yet most dangerous, criticisms of Scripture, because it is done in the very name of Jesus. We have Jesus’ example of how much authority He gave to the Scriptures, which, in His day, consisted of the Old Testament only. What more evidence do we need about how we should view the Old Testament, as well?

Far from weakening the authority of Scripture, Jesus consistently upheld Scripture as a reliable and trustworthy guide. In fact, He unambiguously states in the very same Sermon on the Mount: “ ‘Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill’ ” (*Matt. 5:17, NASB*). And He continues to say that whoever “ ‘annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven’ ” (*Matt. 5:19, NASB*).

What are some of the key doctrines that, to this day, find their grounding in the Old Testament? Think, for example, of Creation (*Genesis 1, Genesis 2*) and the Fall (*Genesis 3*). What other crucial Christian truths do we find in the Old Testament that are later amplified in the New Testament?

Quiet Times With the Word of God

Our lives tend to be hectic and filled with tension and stress. Sometimes we have to work hard just to get by—to survive and to put food on the table. Other times, even when we have the necessities of life, we hustle and bustle because we want more and more. We want the things that we think will make us happy and fulfilled. But, as Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes warns us, that doesn't always happen.

Whatever the reason, we can be terribly busy in our lives, and so it's very easy, amid the busyness, to crowd out God. It's not that we don't believe, but only that we don't spend quality time reading, praying, and drawing close to the Lord, who has “ ‘your breath in His hand’ ” (*Dan. 5:23, NKJV*). We can be too diverted by other things to experience quality time with God. We all need moments in which we deliberately slow down to meet the one who is our Savior, Jesus. How can the Holy Spirit speak to us if we do not pause to listen? The special quiet time with God, in reading His Word and in the communication of prayer, is the source of our spiritual life.

Read Psalm 37:7; Psalm 46:10; and Psalm 62:1, 2, 5. What do these texts teach us about quiet time with God? Why is quiet time with God so important?

If you love someone, you enjoy spending time alone with that beloved person. Choose a place in which you can read and reflect on God's Word without interruptions. In our hectic life, this can succeed only if you deliberately reserve a specific window of time for this encounter. Often the beginning of the day is best for these minutes of quietness and reflection. Such moments before the workday begins can become a blessing for the whole rest of the day, because the valuable thoughts you gain will accompany you for many hours. But be creative to find the right quality time you need in order to meet with God without interruption.

To be connected through prayer with the living God of the Bible affects your life as nothing else ever can. Eventually, it contributes to your becoming more like Jesus.

How deliberate are you in seeking time to spend alone with the Lord? What are those times like, and how do they help you to know even better the reality and love of God?

Memory and Song

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11, NKJV).

Memorizing Scripture brings multiplied blessings. When we store precious passages of God’s Word in our minds, we can bring to life what has been committed to memory and apply it in new and changing circumstances. That way, the Bible directly impacts our thinking, our decisions, and influences our values and behavior. Memorizing Scripture brings the Bible to life in our daily experience. Furthermore, it helps us to worship God and to live a faithful life according to the Scriptures.

To remember Scripture word by word is a tremendous safeguard against deceptions and false interpretations. Learning Scripture by heart enables us to cite Scripture, even when we do not have a Bible available. This can become a tremendous power for good in situations when temptations arise, or when we are faced with adverse challenges. To recall God’s promises, and to fix our minds on God’s Word rather than on our problems, lifts our thoughts to God, who has a thousand ways to help when we see none.

Read Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. How can singing God’s Word establish and strengthen the Word of God in our minds?

Singing the words of the Bible also can be a powerful way to memorize the text of Scripture. In singing, the words of Scripture are more easily remembered. To combine the words of Scripture with beautiful melodies will anchor them in our thoughts more firmly, and be an effective way to dispel our anxious moods. Scripture passages that are connected with simple but harmonious melodies can easily be sung and memorized by little children and adults alike. Scripture was the inspiration for numerous and world-famous oratorios, symphonies, and other music that has shaped and influenced Christian culture throughout the centuries. Compositions that lift up our minds and direct our thoughts to God and His Word are a wonderful blessing and positive influence in our lives.

“Music forms a part of God’s worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of Prayer,” pp. 93–104, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The natural eye can never behold the comeliness and beauty of Christ. The inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, revealing to the soul its true hopeless, helpless condition without the mercy and pardon of the Sin-bearer—the all-sufficiency of Christ—can alone enable man to discern His infinite mercy, His immeasurable love, benevolence, and glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 155.

“Portions of Scripture, even whole chapters, may be committed to memory, to be repeated when Satan comes in with his temptations. . . . When Satan would lead the mind to dwell upon earthly and sensual things, he is most effectually resisted with, ‘It is written.’ ”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 8, 1884.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does the reality of free will and free choice play into all our decisions regarding faith and obedience? Though many areas of our life are out of our control, with regard to the crucial things, the things that pertain to eternal life, we do have free choice. What are you doing with the free will that God has given you? What kind of spiritual choices are you making?
- ❷ Think about the role that the Sabbath can and should play in terms of giving us quiet time with God. How does keeping the Sabbath protect you from being so caught up in working and doing things that you don’t spend the time with God that you need to spend? How can you learn to make the Sabbath more of the spiritual blessing that it was meant to be?
- ❸ What has been your experience in spending time with God alone in prayer and study? How does this spiritual practice impact your faith? How *should* it impact your faith? In class, if you feel comfortable, talk about your own personal times of reading and praying and what you have gained from them. How might others benefit from what you have learned?
- ❹ What are some of your favorite texts that you have memorized? What is it about them that you like so much? How has memorizing them been a blessing to you?

Escape From a Plane Crash

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Pius Kabadi Tshiombe, a 53-year-old lay evangelist, boarded the An-2 single-engine biplane for a flight to visit a church that he planted in a remote region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. But the Soviet-built plane operated by Kinshasa-based Air Kasai developed engine trouble shortly after taking off from Kamako for the 90-mile (150-kilometer) flight to Tshikapa, located near the border with Angola. As the pilot looked for a place to land, the plane lost altitude, and smoke filled the cabin. Tshiombe saw the pilot emerge from the cockpit. “Follow the pilot,” a voice seemed to say.

Tshiombe sprang to his feet. The pilot opened an exit and jumped out. Tshiombe also jumped. Moments later, the An-2 slammed into the bush and burst into flames. The crash occurred about two miles (three kilometers) from the Kamako airport on July 27, 2018. Only Tshiombe and the pilot survived; the other five passengers died. “He survived with only his cell phone,” said Tshiombe’s wife, Nicole, who received confirmation about her husband’s condition via WhatsApp photographs sent by a friend after the crash. “He had a head and leg wound but no broken bones.”

Among the photos was one of Tshiombe, dazed and wearing a blood-soaked shirt, with a cell phone in his hand. Nicole was unable to speak with her husband for three days, but his first words by phone were filled with praise to God. “I will never leave this God,” he told her. “He is wonderful.”

Tshiombe had wanted to visit a small church plant of 15 people that he opened after evangelistic meetings in Kabungyu. But he ended up on the An-2 on a Friday after learning that his desired flight left on Saturday.

“They told him that he would have to travel on the Sabbath,” his wife said. “He said, ‘I can’t because I worship on Sabbath.’ But they said, ‘The flight only goes on Saturday.’ He said, ‘I’ll find another way to reach my destination.’ ”

Tshiombe, pictured second from left, called his wife from the airport to announce his change in plans. He hoped to find a new way to connect to Kabungyu. Nicole has many questions about what happened. She doesn’t understand why only Tshiombe and the pilot survived. She doesn’t know whether Tshiombe’s decision to keep the Sabbath played a role in the story. But she believes that he was delivered as promised in Psalm 91:14, where the Lord says, “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him” (NKJV).

“Be faithful to God because He can protect us at all times,” she said.



Part of a 2019 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped expand the Adventist clinic in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath, which will help spread the gospel in the Trans-European Division.

Key Texts: *James 1:22; Luke 4:4, 8, 10–12; John 5:46, 47; 1 Cor. 2:12–14; Phil. 2:13; Ps. 37:7; Ps. 46:10; Ps. 62:1, 2, 5; Ps. 119:11.*

Part I: Overview

This quarter we have studied various principles of biblical interpretation. But the best hermeneutical principles will avail nothing if they do not lead to a joyful practice of the biblical message. The exposition of Scripture is not just an intellectual exercise. The goal of any study of the Bible is more than acquiring head knowledge. If done properly, it will lead to heart obedience. It is an obedience that is deeper and more meaningful than just outward conformity. It will lead to a joyful faithfulness to the will of God. The truths of Scripture want to be lived, they do not just want to be believed. Such a response to the biblical message is possible only through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, who brings the words of Scripture to new life. He kindles the desire in us to embrace the truths of Scripture and follow them with heart and mind. The best example of this response to Scripture is found in Jesus Christ, who has shown to us how to deal with the Word of God and implement it in one's life. Jesus never nullified Scripture but consistently pointed to Scripture as the authoritative norm for even His words. Jesus also gave us examples of spending quiet time in solitude with the Word of God. This discipline is something we have to regain intentionally in our hectic world. We also can bring Scripture to fruition when we memorize it. Often singing the words of Scripture will anchor them firmly in our minds and hearts and cheer us on.

Part II: Commentary

The Living Word of God and the Holy Spirit

The Bible makes it clear that man in his sinfulness and fallen state is spiritually blind and does not accept the things of God, for they are foolishness to him. He cannot even understand them, because they need to be spiritually discerned (*1 Cor. 2:14*). Even if we were to understand the plain meaning of the words of Scripture clearly, we would have no desire to follow them without the transforming work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to write down the truth God revealed to them (*see 2 Pet. 1:19–21, 2 Tim. 3:16*). But to have the inspired Word of God is not enough. The Word also must be embraced and be applied and implemented

in our lives. Without the Holy Spirit, we will have no appreciation of the divine message and no desire to obey it. Without the Holy Spirit, we will evidence no faith, no hope, and no love in response to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit enables us to see the spiritual and existential significance of the scriptural Word for our lives (*see 1 Cor. 2:12, 14, 15; Eph. 1:17–19; Ps. 119:8*).

The Holy Spirit continues to speak to people through the Bible today, making the Written Word of God come alive. Thus, the dead letter of the biblical book becomes the living Word of God that is sharper than a two-edged sword (*Heb. 4:12*), cutting through to our innermost being and transforming our lives in the light of Scripture. Several biblical passages point out that the task of the Holy Spirit is to put Jesus Christ into central focus, lifting up the Son of God and what He has done for us (*see John 15:26; 1 John 4:2, 3*).

Where have you experienced the help of the Holy Spirit in leading you joyfully to obey the words of Scripture in your life?

Learning From Jesus

By embracing the scriptural Word as trustworthy and true, we are led by the Spirit to accept the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, as our personal Savior and Lord and as our highest example to emulate. We can learn much from the way Jesus used the Scriptures. He was intimately familiar with all that Scripture had to say and was able to quote the exact words of Scripture when He was tempted by the devil (*Matt. 4:4, 7, 10*). His familiarity with Scripture guarded Him against being misled by a selective use of Bible passages. He knew all the Scriptures, and for Him Scripture could not be broken (*John 10:35*). The entire Scripture was sacred for Him. Hence, Jesus repeatedly referred back to Scripture and to what is written (*see Luke 24:45, 46; Matt. 11:10; John 6:45; John 7:38*).

In what way does Jesus' example inspire you to know the words of Scripture better for yourself? How can you become more familiar with the Bible? In what areas do you need to make the Bible the norm for your life and to follow it faithfully?

Jesus Versus Scripture?

One of the things we often hear today is a supposed dichotomy between the "gospel and doctrine." It might sound strange to suggest a contradiction and even antagonism between Jesus and the Bible. But in church history there have been repeated attempts to pitch Christ against Scripture and to elevate Christ as the interpreting norm over what the Bible states. Ultimately some even use Christ to judge Scripture and make some Scripture null and void. Perhaps the most famous example is found in Martin Luther's well-known principle by

which he judged Scripture: "All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate [*treiben*] Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ."—*Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I, Preface to the New Testament*, eds. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 396.

Thus, Scripture must be interpreted in favor of Christ, not against Him. In Luther's view, Christ and Scripture can be set over against each other, because Luther ranked the personal Word (Christ) over the spoken Word (gospel) and the Written Word (Scripture). This approach meant that while Scripture is queen, Christ is King, even over Scripture! If a passage of Scripture seems to be in conflict with Luther's view of Christ, his Christ-centered interpretation becomes a gospel-centered criticism of Scripture, where the content of Scripture is criticized in the name of Christ. Thus, Luther's Christological method became a tool of theological criticism of Scripture. This distinction and ranking leads to a canon within the canon, where Christ becomes the interpretative key and norm for interpreting the Bible but also relegates some parts of the Bible and even whole books, such as the epistle of James, to the periphery as empty and worthless, because they are thought not to point to Christ. The following quotation from Luther illustrates this problematic aspect and is particularly insightful because it deals with the Sabbath:

"Briefly, Christ is the Lord, not the servant, the Lord of the Sabbath, of law, and of all things. The Scriptures must be understood in favor of Christ, not against him. For that reason they must either refer to him or must not be held to be true Scriptures. . . . Therefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures. We have the Lord, they the servants; we have the Head, they the feet or members, over which the Head necessarily dominates and takes precedence. If one of them had to be parted with, Christ or the law, the law would have to be let go, not Christ. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish laws and we shall judge all things rightly. Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel. And these decalogues are clearer than the decalogue of Moses, just as the countenance of Christ is brighter than the countenance of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7–11)."—*Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, eds. Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 112, 113.

Contrast this quote with John 7:38, in which Jesus refers back to Scripture rather than to Himself as the norm for authentic belief.

Quiet Times With the Word of God and Memorizing Scripture

Jesus was busy with healing people and preaching the good news all day long. But He drew His spiritual strength from quality times of solitude in which He would pray (*Mark 1:35*) and recall the promises of Scripture. In our hectic and busy life, we have to plan deliberately for quiet times with God in which we are uninterrupted, have undisturbed time to reflect on God's Word, and can pray. Such quiet times will give us strength and spiritual vitality that nothing else can provide. When you are reading Scripture for the pleasure of it, read less, but read more of what is important for your spiritual life. When your thoughts begin to wander and drift to unimportant subjects, focus your attention on what God has done for you and practice spiritual concentration on the Word of God. Sometimes the singing of a spiritual song or hymn helps to focus our thoughts and even makes it easier to remember and memorize words of Scripture.

Which times of the day are the most undisturbed for you? What helps you to focus on God's Word and have some quality quiet time with Jesus? In what circumstances does singing help you remember the Bible? Where do you see advantages in memorizing parts of Scripture, and how can you use that to be a blessing for others?

Part III: Life Application

Sometimes people say, "Keeping the biblical law not to eat unclean food is not essential for salvation, as long as you believe in Christ." Or people might say, "If you live together even though you are not married, it is not decisive for you as a Christian, as long as you love Jesus." Where do you see a danger in such a line of argumentation? Why is it not safe to go against clear statements of Scripture, even when this is done in the name of Jesus?

Ellen G. White has aptly stated: "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

In light of what we have studied this past quarter, why do you think this principle is so important? What do you want to learn from the way Jesus was familiar with Scripture and from the way He followed the Word of God? How can Scripture become an integral part of your life and influence the decisions you have to make?

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

We have the privilege of joining with Christ in His mission of saving others. That will be the focus of next quarter's guide, entitled "Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission," by Mark Finley.

The idea of mission being God's work first is clarified throughout Scripture. Solomon states it this way, "[God] has put eternity in their hearts" (*Eccles. 3:11*). When a person is born into this world, God places a desire for eternity deep within his or her being. Not only has God placed within each one of us a longing for Himself—but He also sends His Holy Spirit to draw us to Himself. When the human race was condemned to eternal death, the love of God already had made provision. Christ would leave the glory and splendor of heaven and come to this sin-darkened world on a redemptive mission. Before we ever gave Him our life, He provided salvation to us through His death. We turned our backs on Him, but He turned His face toward us. We cared little for Him, but He cared immensely for us. It is not our job to save a lost world; it is God's. But it is our responsibility to joyfully cooperate with God in what He is doing to save the lost. May this guide assist us in understanding our part in mission more clearly.

Lesson 1—Why Witness?

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Providing Opportunities for Salvation** (*James 5:19, 20*)

MONDAY: **Making Jesus Glad** (*Zeph. 3:17*)

TUESDAY: **Growing by Giving** (*Luke 6:38*)

WEDNESDAY: **Faithfulness to Christ's Command** (*Isa. 49:6*)

THURSDAY: **Motivated by Love** (*2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 18–20*)

Memory Text—*1 Timothy 2:3, 4, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: When we understand who God is and have experienced the marvels of His grace and the power of His love, we cannot help witnessing to others about Him.

Lesson 2—Winsome Witnesses: The Power of Personal Testimony

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Unlikely Witnesses** (*Mark 5:15–20*)

MONDAY: **Proclaiming the Risen Christ** (*Mark 16:1–11*)

TUESDAY: **Changed Lives Make a Difference** (*Acts 4:13*)

WEDNESDAY: **Sharing Our Experience** (*Acts 26:8*)

THURSDAY: **The Power of a Personal Testimony** (*Acts 26:1–32*)

Memory Text—*Acts 4:20*

Sabbath Gem: When a person says, "I once was hopeless but now have hope. I was filled with guilt but now have peace. I was purposeless but now have purpose," then even skeptics can see the gospel's power. This is the witness the world so desperately needs.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind *The Adult Sabbath*

School Bible Study Guide is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.