

*Good Word Schedule*  
**How to Interpret Scripture**  
April, May, June, 2020

1. **The Uniqueness of the Bible**—*March 28-April 3*
2. **The Origin and Nature of the Bible**—*April 4-10*
3. **Jesus and the Apostles' View of the Bible**—*April 11-17*
4. **The Bible—The Authoritative Source of our Theology**—*April 18-24*
5. **By Scripture Alone—Sola Scriptura**—*April 25-May 1*
6. **Why is Interpretation Needed?**—*May 2-8*
7. **Languages, Text and Context**—*May 9-15*
8. **Creation: Genesis as Foundation, Part 1**—*May 16-22*
9. **Creation: Genesis as Foundation, Part II**—*May 23-29*
10. **The Bible as History**—*May 30-June 5*
11. **The Bible and Prophecy**—*June 6-12*
12. **Dealing with Difficult Passages**—*June 13-19*
13. **Living by the Word of God**—*June 20-26*

Study Guide author is Brant Berglin, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies: Greek and New Testament in the WWU School of Theology.

For more information about GOOD WORD contact the School of Theology at Walla Walla University by phone (509-527-2194), fax (509-527-2945), email ([GoodWord@wallawalla.edu](mailto:GoodWord@wallawalla.edu)) or regular mail (Walla Walla University, 204 S. College Ave., College Place WA 99324).

Past and present GOOD WORD and PROBE broadcasts are available from our website at [www.wallawalla.edu/goodword](http://www.wallawalla.edu/goodword). GOOD WORD is jointly sponsored by the School of Theology and KGTS at Walla Walla University.

# How to Interpret Scripture

## General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 2nd Quarter of 2020. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

May the God who gave John the Revelation illumine your study by His Spirit as the consummation of Christ's atoning work draws near!

Brant Berglin  
September 25, 2019

*Opening Question*

**Why do many people say the Bible must be interpreted? Can't it just be read and understood?**

*Introduction*

We begin a new study this quarter on the uniqueness of the Bible and how to read and understand this very unique literary work. Why must the Bible be interpreted? First, it's because we (people in the Western world, anyways) are separated from the original author and audience by...

1. thousands of miles and unfamiliar geography
2. between nearly 2,000- and 3,500-years' time
3. two languages largely unrelated to each other and foreign to us
4. different cultural values, lifestyles and relatively primitive technological development

Each of these differences contributes to difficulties in automatically understanding the original Hebrew (and Aramaic) Jewish Scriptures in the Old Testament and the Greek Texts that make up the New Testament Christian Scriptures.

But these challenges are not insurmountable. It's possible to travel to Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and other places mentioned in the Bible; we can understand the topography since much remains the same of mountains and plains, of sea, rivers and lakes. Archaeology has uncovered many Biblical sites and provided evidence of life during the time of the Israelite monarchy or the time of Jesus. It is possible to learn Greek and Hebrew and read the original languages with a high degree of accuracy and certainty of the author's original meaning for vast majorities of these texts. The marvelous discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls have affirmed our preservation of modern copies of the Old Testament, while the sheer number of ancient handwritten copies of New Testament *Greek* manuscripts—over 6,000 fragments or whole books or letters at the time of this lesson—and the incredibly small number of significant differences between them, contributes to our confidence in the original authors' words.

*The "Word"*

The Bible is written in human languages with words, using Hebrew (and some Aramaic) in the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament, and Greek in the Christian Scriptures of the New Testament.

In both Testaments, the *Word of God* plays a central role. The Hebrew word *dabar* and the Greek word *logos* have a similar range of meaning: a word, concept, idea, speech, or just "thing." Much like someone saying, "I'd like to have a *word* with you," it usually means more than just one single word.

Most frequently in the Old Testament, the word *dabar* is used for speech or ideas from God, much like in the Deuteronomy 32:45-47 passage where Moses tells Israel to keep the law as they enter into Canaan. To Moses, to Joshua, to Judges, and to priests, kings and prophets, the *word of the Lord* came to teach, instruct, direct, inspire, and correct.

The Greek version of the original Hebrew Old Testament, called the Septuagint, translates the word *dabar* as *logos*, indicating that they are largely synonymous. We don't always see this use in our English translations, but the word *logos* also shows up in reference to the 10 Commandments as the "10 *words*" of God.

This concept becomes vital to understand because the New Testament refers to Jesus Himself as the very *logos*, that is, the idea of God. Jesus is the embodiment of the Old Testament word(s) and ideas from God, including the 10 Commandment law, and the messages of Psalmists, prophets, and kings.

Knowing the original languages and how the words were used thousands of years ago reveal more clearly to us how Jesus Christ comes to fill the Old Testament full of meaning.

**How might we relate the Old and New Testament concept of *word* to our technologically-literate society who read less, and rely more on video?**

*The Writers*

Contributors to the Bible as a final composite whole include shepherds, kings, prophets, fishermen, scholars, Jews, Gentiles, rabbis, farmers, governors, and others. All writers were male, as far as we know (even so, women’s perspectives are not absent from the text, nor are their interests ignored or sidelined!). Not all of those asked to speak for God were willing; but even the reluctant or resistant, such as Jonah, provide important perspective to the plan of God throughout history. Read through the scriptures in the Sabbath School lesson related to the different authors and you’ll see some of their different backgrounds.

As scholars become more comfortable reading the original languages, the unique style, grammar, vocabulary, and way of thinking of each author becomes apparent. John’s Greek is much more simple than Paul’s, and Luke’s is more refined and educated than both John or Paul. Old Testament Psalmists use much more expressive, picturesque and multi-layered language in their songs than is used in the Laws of Moses. In spite of these differences, later writers use earlier authors and build on their work as authoritative.

**Does the multiplicity of authors in the Bible make it more or less reliable in your view? Why or why not?**

*Prophecy*

Beginning with Genesis 3 and God’s intervention in the human predicament known as “the fall,” predictive prophecy gives hope to sinful people. Someday, God will bring about an offspring of the woman who will bring an end to the deceitful serpent. This optimistic promise is the foundation for all other prophecy in scripture, as it reveals what God wants to do. He will fix the sin problem by being intimately involved with His creation, by making a covenant with them, and even becoming one like them—an offspring of the woman.

Throughout the Old Testament, the hopes of this coming deliverer—often one *chosen* or *anointed* by God—are expressed when a new leader, king or prophet arises, especially when the birth is miraculous (see the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Mrs. Isaiah, and Elisabeth and Mary in the New Testament). The prophets try to keep Israel faithful, because it is through this people—offspring of Abraham—that God promised to be a blessing to the nations. Thus we find Israel’s prophets building on the Messianic (“anointed”) hopes. The Sabbath School quarterly for this quarter lists a number of these prophecies.

Beyond the direct prophecies, many stories, institutions, places, and events also have a “parallelism” to the birth, ministry, life, death, resurrection, and kingship/priesthood of Jesus. These are called “types,” and once you begin to see them, they’re nearly impossible to miss.

Many of the Old Testament prophets quoted in Matthew's gospel are typological applications of people or events.

As far as I know, no other significant religious work in the world contains the type of predictive passages found in the Bible. It is unique to Judeo-Christianity. The fact that the future could be foretold with such amazing accuracy has convinced many of its divine origin. If it could be this knowledgeable about the future, then it lends credence to the historical and ethical/moral sections as well. One week's lesson this quarter will focus on prophecy.

**Is there an Old Testament prophecy relating to the Messiah that is most compelling or meaningful for you?**

### *The Bible as History*

That the Bible records actual history has been the subject of much debate. But many of the Biblical characters find attestation outside of the Bible record, and the historical sections of the Bible (e.g., Samuel, Kings, Ezra/Nehemiah) can reliably guide archeologists and historians as they reconstruct the past. We know where most of the Bible's stories took place, that they happened to real people who actually lived. It is not just a "religious" work, nor is it written as fiction, even "Christianized fiction." The role the Bible plays in one's individual life and faith is rooted largely on the factuality of the events recorded in the Scripture. How can the God who preserved Noah on the ark preserve you today if the flood event never happened? Why should we take a future judgement seriously if Sodom and Gomorrah were just fictitious places? Why should I believe that Jesus was anyone special if he was only a myth? More will be said this quarter about the Bible as history, too.

**The Bible was written over nearly 1,500 years by a number of different authors, yet many readers discover it tells a unified story rooted in our world's history. What lessons might this suggest about its inspiration, its overarching narrative, and the main Actor(s)?**

### *Closing Comments*

There is no book like the Bible for its complexity, depth of message, and value for personal life—both here-and-now and as preparation for eternity. As valuable as the book is, it should be no surprise that God's enemy would like to see it set aside, misunderstood, or misused. As we delve deeper this quarter into how best to read *and* interpret, I hope you will find both insight into its amazing mysteries and tools to better understand God's message for our time and your own life.

*Opening Question***Did God tell the prophets and apostles exactly what to write in the Bible?***Introduction*

Where did the Bible come from? What drove the writers to put their thoughts to paper? How did the documents become “authoritative” for the Jewish and Christian communities? What led to their selection as part of collections known today as Old and New Testaments, respectively? All of these questions are important to understanding the Bible’s origin. Some of these questions will be answered this quarter, but there are also many resources—including the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary that provide answers and background..

A wide variety of beliefs exist concerning the human vs. divine origin of the Bible. The most fundamentalist Christians, many being evangelical or non-denominational in affiliation, hold that God dictated the text exactly as it was written in the original Hebrew and Greek texts; to be the “word of God,” it had to come directly from Him. On the opposite extreme are those who conclude the texts are the product of human imagination and creativity apart from any kind of divine being; many such people do not believe in a god at all; they are atheists or agnostics. Between these extremes is where most Christians are found across the spectrum, often leaning more to one side or the other. Some believe the Bible merely describes human encounters with the divine, while others believe God’s Spirit actually directed the writing to a greater or lesser degree, but not actually decreeing or imposing on the prophet the exact words to write.

While Adventists have not, as a faith-organization, historically been believers in verbal inspiration, there are some who are; there is even a hint of it in Sunday’s lesson: “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.” The implication here is verbal inspiration, but even Ellen White was careful about not going down this path. See especially the whole context of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Selected Messages (quoted in part in this week’s lesson), where she argues that God is not on trial in the words of the Bible; God inspired the writers, and the human authors chose the words in their own way to communicate the ideas. Thus inspiration acts *on* the writer, not always the specific words; even so, the final product is both that of man and God, an incarnational document!

**What characteristics can you note about individual authors when you read their books of the Bible? Can you see themes, style, vocabulary, education, etc.?***2 Peter 1:19-21*

The context of this passage is important for Peter’s argument. He recounts the amazing experience that he, along with James (“*Jacob*” in the Greek) and John, witnessed at Jesus’ transformation in glory when he was changed before them (see Matt 16:28-17:9).

If the disciples’ senses were overwhelmed—sight at the vision and hearing God’s very voice—and faith grew from this encounter, how much *more* does the prophetic word bring conviction.

The most important part of this passage for our lesson this week is in verse 21 where it describes prophetic inspiration as men, moved by the Spirit, spoke *from* God. The prophet or apostle was actuated, motivated, or empowered by the Spirit of God, so that the ultimate or *implied* author of the Bible is God Himself. While this is helpful, it still doesn’t answer the more specific questions about exactly how and to what degree God’s Spirit intervenes in the mind of

the writer, directing to sources of information (previous written accounts, oral tradition, eye-witnesses), choosing words or eliminating others, or organizing the order of the final content and written product.

The lesson directs us to Deuteronomy 18:18, saying God would put His words in the prophet's mouth, but that "prophet" is none other than Christ, thus the very words are God's because Jesus is God. The passage from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 points out that Scripture is "God-breathed," the original wording translated in many modern versions as "inspired." But again, this isn't specific to the exact degree of control the Spirit has in the process.

**Does the degree of control God's Spirit had over the writer change how authoritative the Bible is for us? Would we read, use or apply the Bible differently if we thought it was verbally inspired versus if we believed the human author exhibited relative freedom and independence in writing?**

### *The Written Word*

The lesson lists a number of places where divine messages were to be recorded, written down by putting writing tool to media source. Ancient tools for writing included an iron stylus imprinting shapes in wax or clay, and quill pens dipped in gall-ink and inscribing characters on papyrus (plants hammered flat) or velum (stretched and dried animal skins). The value of the written word remains with us today—though beware of Ecclesiastes 12:12!—maybe moreso than ever in history.

**What is the value of having a written record of God's Word, rather than just oral tradition?**

### *John 1:1-18*

As meaningful as are the written Old Testament words about God, much more valuable is the message about God in the person of His Son. If the words about God from prophets told of His character, closeness to His people, and covenant, the incarnation revealed far more. And yet the two are not incompatible, or opposed to one another. Rather, the prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah. In fact, the beginning of John's gospel mirrors Genesis 1-2, where "in the beginning," God spoke and into existence came the world and everything in it. In these last days, God has *spoken* to us through one who is Son (Hebrews 1:1). In other words, Jesus is a new creation, a new manifestation of the amazing creative power of God.

**Read through these verses in John. How much of the character of God is revealed in the "word made flesh"? What can we know about God through Christ?**

### *Closing Comments*

Thursday's lesson concludes with a discussion about approach the Bible from a perspective of faith. Trusting the message of God and allowing the Spirit to bring conviction is vital to spiritual life and growth. But perhaps a more fundamental attitude is humility; we approach the Bible willing to hear God speak, inviting Him to use the document to communicate His love, grace, and transforming power to me personally. The written word, and the incarnate Word, become real to *me*!

*Opening Question*

**Did the New Testament authors quote from or use the Old Testament in irresponsible ways, or were they on to something?**

*Introduction*

Some modern scholars have concluded that the New Testament apostles and gospel authors didn't apply a consistent interpretive approach to the Old Testament; they ignored the original context in order to draw lessons from their "Bible" that weren't at all intended by the writers. Christian

This week's lesson contains some of the most important interpretive principles for approaching the Old Testament, and it comes by understanding how the New Testament authors, and Jesus Himself, read and interpreted it. How did they approach the text? What authority did they ascribe to it? About what was it really speaking, especially the passages that seem to extend beyond the time of the original prophet and his audience? Could the O.T. prophet(s) have foreshadowed the Messiah, whether through their prophecies, or even their own experiences which they recorded?

*Matthew 4:1-11*

Jesus used scripture to defend against the temptations of Satan. But the lesson fails to bring out the broader context. Jesus (Hebrew name is actually *Joshua*) began his ministry by being baptized, then going into the wilderness for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan. The parallels between Jesus and Israel in the Old Testament are many. Israel left Egypt (where Jesus was as a boy, too), passed through the water (baptized in the Red sea into Moses, according to Paul), and entered the wilderness where they were tempted. Israel failed, multiple times; Jesus succeeded. The passages from which Jesus quotes are all from Deuteronomy, the reading of the Law immediately before Joshua took over for Moses and led Israel into Canaan. That Jesus is a new Israel becomes obvious when reading the scripture more broadly.

Is the Bible also a shield against temptation for us personally? Certainly! However, we cannot use what we do not know. Thus, as Jesus knew Deuteronomy by heart, so we should commit scripture to memory, in order to call on God's promises in times of difficulty, and psalms of praise in moments of joy and victory.

**What does Jesus' use of the book of Deuteronomy in his use of Scripture against Satan's attacks reveal about His view of the Old Testament?**

*The O.T. Law and Jesus*

Read Matthew 5. When Jesus quoted from the law in the sermon on the Mount, He not only noted it wasn't His purpose to destroy it (but to fulfill it), but He also showed the spiritual nature of the law. This was in stark contrast to the legalistic attitudes of the Pharisees who prided themselves on outward show, but inwardly had hearts of stone. The purpose of the law had ever been to point out human need of a substitute, the lamb sacrificed for their forgiveness. This kindness was meant to lead to repentance. Jesus doesn't violate the O.T. law, but lived it. As long as the 10 commandments are merely rules on stone, they are of little value; in fact, they are a ministry of death since they could only point out the sin of those they govern. They had no power to cleanse anyone from sin. Jesus removed the legal loopholes of Judaism, and



condemned everyone under sin. The need for a Savior only grew with Jesus' teaching about the law. Grace became exceedingly generous as the spiritual nature of the law made sin exceedingly sinful.

In numerous gospel texts read this week, it's clear that Jesus' Bible, the Old Testament, was not just stories from the past, but had present authority for Him, as well as the Apostles. The account of human creation, the Sabbath and marriage forms the foundation for all future Sabbath rest and marriage. Old Testament characters are never undermined as merely mythical, but assumed to be both historical as well as spiritual-educational examples of both brokenness as well as victory.

**How can we respond to Christians who say the law was meant only for Israel and is now done away with, but the church is under grace.?**

### *Closing Comments*

Perhaps the most important principle learned from New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament is that nearly every citation from it by Jesus or the Apostles is used to exalt God's salvation as fulfilled in the Messiah, through the experiences of His church, or in the final events on earth before Christ returns. Thus, the Old Testament is not at odds with the New, but is a vital foundation for all that happens in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond. One cannot understand the New without the Old, for it would have no context; likewise, we will never see the fulfillment or completion of God's work in Israel without the writings of the gospels and apostles.

*Opening Question*

**What gives the Bible so much influence in people's lives so many years after it was written? Isn't it outdated, and obsolete due to the progression of science and human reason?**

*Introduction*

This week's lesson takes on several at-times conflicting human values, but all of which influence both the writing of the Bible, and our own interpretive lens:

- Tradition
- Experience
- Culture
- Reason
- The Bible

The lesson, however, doesn't do a great job showing how/why the Bible is such an authoritative source for our theology.

**Can you think of places in the Bible where each of these is brought up or exemplified?**

*Tradition*

The lesson points to Mark 7:1-13. This challenging passage must first be seen in context: the Pharisees asked Jesus why he doesn't follow the "tradition of the elder." This does not mean Torah (or O.T. Law), but the oral interpretation of the Rabbis which was memorized and considered "inspired" commentary on the law. It was later codified as law itself in the Talmud and Mishna several centuries after Christ. Rabbis would argue over correct interpretation or application of the law, and respected Rabbis' words carried the day. Jewish Yeshiva students today learn Torah, but words of the Rabbis are often just as important!

It's important to note that nowhere in this passage are the Levitical/Deuteronomic dietary codes specifically called into question; the context is over purity rituals where unwashed hands defiled food, due most likely to association with/touching common items. Jesus declares all food clean, yes, but certain animals in Judaism were never "food" in the first place.

**After reading Mark 7, what is the essential problem Jesus has with the "tradition of the elders?" How can we prevent ourselves from adopting traditions that violate God's will?**

*Experience*

I've known people who have had dreams that they believed were from God, or claimed to have hear God speak to them directly; some saw "signs" of God in events around them and they drew spiritual conclusions from what they assumed was divine providence. Their experiences were powerful shapers of their beliefs and even courses of action. In the secular world, human

experience often becomes the standard of judging what is normative. Take resurrection of the dead for example. Because we don't experience it, the secular mind assumes it is a product of people's imagination or ancient myths, not reality. Yet Christian faith rests on it being a reality.

Modern science is founded on the premise that what we experience through our primary senses is the foundation of all reality. If I can duplicate a sensory experience, it becomes testable, and then normative and accepted as truth. The scientific method has incredible value for building knowledge and understanding the world around us, but it is limited to *what* is in the physical world, and cannot address issues of *what should be*, of ethics, philosophy, or even subjective human experience, let alone metaphysical realities like God's existence, resurrection from the dead, and salvation/sanctification.

**To what degree should the Bible be a test of our experiences, and where do its limits end?**

### *Culture*

This word is used frequently in modern sociological and political conversations. It often describes traditional ways of being human that distinguish one person or group from others. Sadly, it's often politicized and weaponized as well. All humans share some aspects of culture—all must eat to survive, and thus the procurement of sustenance and water is foundational. But ethical and moral norms, social interaction, procreativity, education, religion, and a myriad of other human aspects may differ.

Every person who reads the Bible brings their own worldview and values to the text. While modern sociologists state that all cultures are equal in their own right, this position is challenged by the ethics of Judeo-Christianity. Biblical cultures varied from our own, yet the mistakes and successes of Jewish characters are frequently understandable across cultures. God's word and prophets often challenged aspects of their own culture, calling them to ethics higher than that of the nations around them to which they were often drawn. The Bible challenges aspects of culture: what we eat and wear, what laws and actions should govern society, where we put our money and time, how we view and practice sexuality, and what our life-priorities should be.

**How can our cultural bias or lens affect our interpretation of God's Word? What if I fail to understand the culture of the Bible—can I still understand and interpret it correctly?**

### *Reason*

A person cannot function without the use of reason. The challenge is to know the role of reason, discernment, and distinguishing of spirits when it comes to spiritual things, and the Bible especially. Isaiah 1:18 reminds us that God wants us to reason with Him, to consider and ponder. Paul is often pictured in Acts as meeting with Jews and "reasoning" from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah, using convincing proofs and philosophical logic and arguments.

But can reason be applied to critiquing the Bible as a text? Can we use our own standards to judge what aspects of the Bible are worth taking seriously and which are not, which are believable and which are only symbolic, myth, legend, or hyperbole? If my reason tells me that

resurrection doesn't happen today, do I then dismiss Christ's resurrection as a fable, or just a spiritual symbol? Human reason and science have too many limits to reject other possibilities.

**How much of my reason is affected by sin? What is the line between using reason to understand and apply the Bible's teachings or narrative case-studies to daily life, and using reason to undermine the Bible?**

### *Closing Comments*

This lesson ultimately does little to answer why or in what way, scripture is the source or basis for our theology (the title of the week's lesson). However, if we could posit a conclusion, it might be that because the Biblical text has found fertile soil in the human heart throughout the millennia, it has proved itself over time to effect change in the lives of people. It became authoritative, practically speaking, because the first hearers of the text found it relevant to their lives and relationship with God. It consistently directs people to God and His law, His salvation and forgiveness, and earth's future. Thus, becomes an authoritative guide to our spiritual lives.

*Opening Question*

**Where in the Bible would you turn to show someone the principle of “sola scriptura?” Can such a belief be defended from the Bible alone?**

*Introduction*

Reformers found in the Bible direct evidence against both the practices and doctrines of the Roman church and papal/priestly power. Rome claimed that tradition was an equally valid form of authority with the Bible, but scripture was often at odds with tradition. Which should be the final arbiter of truth? As spirit-led scholars studied the Bible, they concluded that the Word of God, as revealed in the Bible, should have the final say.

Although the Bible doesn't clearly outline a *Sola Scriptura* doctrine, different passages emphasize the importance of the Word of the Lord as the ultimate authority in human experience. This week's lesson attempts to do a couple things: first, to build support for the idea of a Sola Scriptura position, and second, to defend a more literal interpretation than the more common allegorical approach of the Roman Catholic church. How solid is the Biblical foundation for these two goals?

*Importance of History and Previous Revelation: Isaiah 8*

During the days of Isaiah, a sign was given that the God of Israel was still in control, even though enemy armies surrounded them, powerful nations who outnumbered with vastly superior military might. What should Israel do?

The answer was certainly *not* to consult the dead—through spiritist and mediums—but to turn to God, to what He had already revealed in His law. Verses 16 and 20 show the importance for Israel to remember both the written record of Israel's history as well as God's law given to them. Their future depended on remembering the past. Interpretation of their present duty and circumstances were only accurate as they came through Torah, the “books of Moses.”

**Why does the law (Torah, that is Genesis-Deuteronomy) form a vital foundation to the rest of the Hebrew prophets, and for the New Testament as well?**

*Jesus' Use of the Old Testament*

Throughout the gospels, Jesus' ministry is said to “fulfill” what was written through the prophets. Jesus Himself accepts the Old Testament as the word of God, and He devoted Himself to learning its lessons, having much of it memorized. Even on the cross, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm is on His lips and describes His entire crucifixion experience.

One cannot study the life of Jesus separate from the Old Testament, because they predict, foretell, and even through types and stories, show the work of the Messiah. This “canonical theological approach” to the Bible is the methodology of Matthew especially. He ties the events of Christ to those of the Old Testament in unbroken sequence, and as if divine providence was directing the course of both prophetic utterance and Christ's life down to many details. There are no accidents in Christ's life.

For Jesus also, the interpretation of His own life was that of previous scripture. These thematic, historical and theological ties mean that the Old and New Testaments really interpret each other. This is the principle of Sola Scriptura practically speaking. The principle becomes exceptionally important when it comes to interpreting prophetic books like Isaiah, Zechariah, and Revelation.

**What would happen to our picture of Jesus and the gospel if we only had the New Testament?**

*Ellen White's Relationship to the Bible*

Adventists are often challenged with the role of Ellen White's ministry and writings compared with the Bible. Sadly, many Adventists who greatly value her contributions to and guidance of the church have functionally replaced the Bible with her. She would object strenuously! In fact, as the quarterly quoted, she herself wished people would study the Bible much more rigorously.

**How can we appreciate and encourage people to read her works without falling prey to the temptation of abandoning the Bible?**

**How should Adventists respond when they see Ellen White misused in spiritually abusive situations, or placed above the Bible?**

*Closing Comments*

While I don't feel the lesson really fulfilled the two goals it set out to complete, it does a couple things well: it shows the value of the unity of the Bible, and the role of Ellen White as an encouragement and helpful guide to Biblical study.

### *Opening Question*

**How many different *types* of literature are contained in our Bibles, and should we read or interpret them all in the same way?**

### *Introduction*

This week's lesson is on the need for interpretation, and "hermeneutics," that is, the tools of interpretation. One would hope this lesson would draw out the actual methods of doing so. The introduction suggests that genres of scripture would be central to the study. However, it also examines subjects already covered: the effects of culture and translation from the original languages, our presuppositions and sinful tendencies that bias us.

The study of the different genre really should be a number of separate day's lessons. Each genre or literary type in the Bible should have several days associated with it. For this week, let's examine broadly the genres of scripture.

### *Genres*

The following types of literature are present to a greater or lesser degree in Scripture. Each has it's own need for care in studying, and has it's own tools for understanding.

- Narrative – best known as “story” or “discourse,” where the author recounts events with characters, actions, plot, conflict, resulting in either tragedy or success as resolution. Reading the whole story is vital to understanding the context, and often the broader context is required to understand a story. The flood story, for instance, harkens back to the creation account, so much so, that it is intended to be seen as an undoing of the original creation and a fresh start, a *new creation*, if you will. Some of Torah, much of the Former Prophets (Samuel, Kings) and some of the latter, as well as some the Writings are narrative.
- Law – The Laws of Israel are contained mainly in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. These can be examined as either apodictic (“do this, period!”) or casuistic (“if this happens, then apply this penalty this way”), and further divisions are often attempted through “civil,” “ceremonial/religions,” and “moral.” A fairly serious challenge with O.T. laws is the consistent overlap between these three areas, and thus ascertaining their continuing relevance to modern society or Christians.
- Poetry – Found from Genesis through the prophets, through the use of parallelism, imagery and frequent word-play (puns, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, hyperbole, anthropomorphism, etc.), Hebrew poetry reaches the heart through the creative side of the brain, and well as the emotions. When God says he set the “pillars” of the earth, it doesn't literally mean He is propping it atop rods of stone like a bridge. But the image is of God as a competent engineer in charge of earth. The parallelism can be either a line or two, or the entire poem can be parallel (A-B-C-B'-A') structure called chiasm. We see poetry at an high level in Song of Songs (or “of Solomon”).

- Wisdom literature – Often poetic in structure, the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes are classified as wisdom literature. While Proverbs assumes the general truth “if you do the right things, you’ll be blessed,” Job and Ecclesiastes provide a Great Controversy counterpoint: the proverbs are true most of the time, but sin makes things complicated, and even wisdom has a limited application. And the proverbs must be applied contextually, not absolutely, even if they follow general rules of life.
- Prophecy/Oracle against nations – Much of the O.T. is prophetic in nature, but usually we think of the Latter Prophets, both Major (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and Minor (“book of the 12”). Their messages are often similar: 1) you’re sinning, 2) repent! 3) if you don’t, there will be judgment, and 4) God will restore through a faithful remnant. The prophets didn’t just predict the future, but called Israel—and the nations!—back to faithfulness to Him
- Gospel – the stories of Jesus aren’t the only gospels known. But they are the oldest and most reliable, often quoted by early church fathers, and consistent between themselves to a very high degree. Each is built on narrative with sub-genres: birth/death narrative, miracle accounts, teaching, etc. Each of these sub-genre has its own challenges for interpretation, but especially parables. To what degree are the details in the parable part of the application or reality (see the “Rich Man and Lazarus” in Luke 16 for example)?
- Epistle (including *exhortations* like 1<sup>st</sup> John and Hebrews) – The letters of the new Testament, as correspondence between apostles and individuals, congregations, or regions, seem like wonderful advice from a loving parent on how to live the Christian life. They wrestle with issues in the local churches of the time, and some of the advice given there must be given a context before applied directly to our own day. Much like Ellen White’s advice that people of her day should not have bikes, some of the N.T. letters require some background before applying too generally. However, much of the advice is universal to all Christians, especially doctrinal/theological teachings about God, the Spirit and Christ, His church, and things to come (eschatology).
- Apocalyptic – Daniel and Revelation, and parts of Zechariah (some might add Matthew 24) are considered Apocalyptic literature. This material is extreme prophecy filled with images/symbols, cosmic sweep, heaven/earth dichotomy, angel interpreters, and prophetic oracle all-in-one. Knowing when a symbol is implied vs. literal object is part of the challenge facing interpreters. More will be said about this genre later.

### **Why would it be irresponsible to interpret Poetry or Narrative in the same way as Law?**

#### *Closing Comments*

God’s did not give his word in monochrome, but in multiple genres to speak to various minds and individuals. The amazing part is the consistent message across the various books/letters. There is, as Ellen White says, “a gold thread” that ties it all together.



*Opening Question*

**What are some of the challenges in translating the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible into English, and other modern languages around the world?**

*Introduction*

Although Adventists do not hold to verbal inspiration, this does not mean the words chosen by the Bible writers were not important. We might think that words always “mean what they mean,” but this is not the case. Individual words only have meaning in a given context. For instance, in sarcasm, the words usually indicate the exact opposite of what they mean (“I can’t wait to have a root canal!”). In symbolism, the word is a code for something else (Jesus’ use of “temple” for “body”). In idioms, slang meanings approximate the actual meaning (“hit the sack” for “go lie in bed”). Words are important, and sometimes they have multiple meanings. All this has a part to play when translating the Biblical text into modern language.

*The Importance of Words: Luke 10:15, Acts 2:27*

In Jesus’ woe on the unrepentant cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum he said they would be brought down to “hades.” For the Greeks, this word summoned images of the god of the underworld, *Hades* himself, and thus of the fiery afterlife of the wicked. However, when used in the New Testament, it often translates the Jewish idea of the *grave*, that is, where you bury a dead body, without the Greco-Roman baggage. It is the same word used throughout the Old Testament to translate the word “*sheol*,” which is likewise used of the grave. The Hebrew idea of “sleeping with one’s fathers” as did David, Solomon, and the rest of the kings, includes a rest in *sheol*. To interpret the New Testament meaning through the Greeks is to completely miss the Jewish backgrounds of the word. Acts 2:27 quotes the Psalms and shows how the word is equivalent to undergoing decay in the grave, not some everburning fire.

The lesson points out the meanings of *hesed* and *shalom*. These words are indeed rich, deep, and often experiential. Their range of meaning cannot come from just a single passage or story, but must be understood by reading widely throughout *all* the stories, laws, and poetry of the Bible.

**Should a Bible pride itself on being a faithful “word-for-word” translation? Or is there a better method of translation?**

*Repetition: Poetry and Psalm 22*

The lesson points out how repetition shows emphasis in the Hebrew mind. This is especially so in poetry through parallelism. Where Western-world poetry usually is noted for vocalic rhyme where last words in a line sound like the last words in the previous line, Hebrew poetry exemplifies idea-rhyming. Their use of synonyms—not just in words, but in ideas—communicates things in multiple ways increasing the ability to memorize, and see something from several different angles at one time.

Look at Psalm 22. We see the parallelism beginning in the very first verse. This Messianic psalm begins with David feeling forsaken (line 1), and far from deliverance (line 2). In verse 2, he cries by day (but no answer), by night (but he has no rest). The lines are not intended to be exact parallels, but are closely related. This style of language permeates not just individual lines, but larger sections of poetry. Sometimes the themes of an entire book are parallel.

**Why do Biblical texts contain so much repetition? Couldn't the Bible be a lot shorter and say the same thing?**

*Context: Beyond Literary Surroundings*

The lesson this week makes much of the literary context of a word, and this is the primary place it receives meaning: first, the level of the phrase or sentence; second, the passage; third, the story or section; fourth, the book; fifth, the collection of books (i.e., "Minor Prophets," "Prison Epistles"); sixth, Old or New Testament; and seventh, the entire Bible.

One vital area of context the lesson says little about is the historical/social context. While this cannot always be known or reconstructed, knowing just a little bit of background of "why," "where," "when," and "who," aids interpretation. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus' admonition to "go the second mile" makes more sense when we know that Roman soldiers could commandeer a bystander to carry their gear for a mile.

**What are some of the dangers with historical context? When can we take it too far?**

*Meaning of Books: Chronicles*

Much of the world has the inestimable privilege of reading God's word unhindered, and to applying it in their lives. The big picture, or largest level of meaning, emerges from reading the entire book, often more than once. We can see this easily in a small letter like Jude, or even a larger one like Joel. However, with something as large as Chronicles, it can be more difficult. When we compare Chronicles to Samuel/Kings, it's clear there is a lot of overlap and re-telling the same stories. But what is emphasized and what is left out shows the author's main point: Israel's exile is the result of abandoning God, and worship at His sanctuary. The rebuilding of the temple in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah is because of God's graciousness following Judah's discipline in Babylon for 70 years.

**What messages emerge when you read the Bible widely, whole letters at a time or in a sitting? Do you see a grand theme throughout the entire Bible?**

*Closing Comments*

Words, sentences, paragraphs, sections, books, testaments, whole Bible. Meaning is achieved by reading it all, and giving each its proper value. If I could recommend anything, it would be to spend time doing two types of study of the Bible: first, read large portions at a time to see the big picture. Second, study much smaller portions, maybe a couple verses or a section in-depth. Then notice how that smaller portion helps understand the whole.

*Opening Question*

**Can you conceive of or imagine anything that doesn't have a beginning?**

*Introduction*

Genesis lays the groundwork—indeed, narratively sets the stage—for the rest of the Bible's grand, overarching theme: redemption and atonement (at-one-ment) with God. The text assumes there to be a God, and attributes to Him powers beyond that of any other known being. He is able to create something from nothing (ex nihilo) by simply willing it to be, and making it known through speaking. And thus we have ostriches, jellyfish, dandelions, mountains, clouds, and friends. How important are these first stories in Genesis? Some of the most strained theological disagreements stem from how we interpret the text: how did the world come to be, life, especially? How significant today should we make the "7<sup>th</sup> day of creation" on which God rested? Is the Genesis model of marriage still tenable, and is it an exclusive model for us? To what degree did the fall of Adam and Eve from perfection lead us down a path of brokenness, was it only sociologically, or is it a genetic liability?

*Genesis 1-2*

Read through Genesis 1-2. Without allowing yourself to argue for or against a certain type of creation (literal 7 days, evolution, etc.), examine first what these passages say about God. He is, after all, the first character in the Narrative. This means the story is first about Him, and His Spirit. He arrives at a place of watery chaos and interacts personally with it. He is powerful, his word creates. He is good, his creation is just right. He is thoughtful, everything needed for life to survive—no, to thrive!—is here. He is creative, all manner of plant and animal life abounds (teems). He is vast, he can make planets and star systems. He is personal, shaping a man and constructing a woman (opposite terms from what we might associate today with the sexes). He is gracious, he blesses them with prosperity and fruitfulness. He is generous, he grants or delegates to humans leadership and stewardship of the planet. He is wonderful, earth is made to be enjoyed, the right kinds of pleasure abound everywhere!

**What picture of God do you appreciate most from the creation accounts? Is there one that resonates more than others?**

*Days of Creation*

The use of the Hebrew word *yom* that concludes each day of creation is used sequentially with a cardinal numeral, giving it specificity and orderliness. That God rested on the Sabbath, and established a weekly day to commemorate His rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day is consistent with His character and the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment in Exodus 20:8-11. This is a very serious matter. Ellen White (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 111) levels a fairly serious charge against those who feel Genesis 1 incorporated vast periods of time, including evolutionary development to humans from simple life, in her chapter entitled "The Literal Week":

**...the assumption that the events of the first week required thousands upon thousands of years, strikes directly at the foundation of the fourth commandment. It represents the Creator as commanding men to observe the week of literal days in commemoration of vast, indefinite periods. This is unlike His method of dealing with His creatures. It makes indefinite and obscure that which He has made very plain. It is infidelity in its most insidious and hence most dangerous form; its real character is so disguised that it is held and taught by many who profess to believe the Bible.**

At the same time, the quarterly must be careful what it claims, namely, that *yom* in the creation account always means the same thing. Actually *yom* isn't always used for just a day of 24 hours or of one earth-rotation (if the rotation speed at creation was more or less than our measured 24-hour period, which is entirely possible due to cataclysmic changes in earth from the flood or other catastrophe).

For instance, in 1:5 and 1:14, 16, 18, the word *yom* is distinguished from the night or darkness as the lighted part of the cycle governed by the Sun, not as the whole cycle of 24 hours. *Yom* can mean "the light part of the earth's rotation," or a 12-hour period *of* the larger day.

Furthermore, the chiasmic 2:4, a transitional verse between the accounts of chs. 1 and 2, uses *yom* to indicate the general time period of God's creation as a whole, unless one takes this verse to imply the entire creation of the complementary universe in one day.

And there are lessons in the first two chapters of Genesis that aren't related to the days being literal or not. Perhaps more time can be spent learning those, as well!

**How significant is it to overall Biblical understanding that we interpret the seven days as literal? What happens if we take a different approach? What do we lose or gain with each view, that is, what is at stake here?**

### *Genesis 3*

It's difficult to innumerate the changes that come on the world with mankind's disobedience to God's one law. Fear, selfishness, shame, separation, hiding, blaming, and these are just the relational aspects between people and toward God. Natural/environmental changes also attended the transfer of power from Adam as overseer of earth to Satan (the ancient serpent, see Job 1-2, and 41): decay and death, pain and predation now reign. As Paul says in Romans 8:22: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." But the curse wasn't given without a promise. Do you see it in Ch. 3?

**What did the fall of mankind cost humans? What about the Creator Himself?**

### *Closing Comments*

If Genesis 1-3 sets the stage for the Bible, it couldn't do so more dramatically, yet efficiently. The narrative is incredibly brief, yet packed with truths, even for those who disagree on some of the details. A couple foundational pieces seem inescapable: a good creation was God's intent, but now He is going to help remedy the mess human disobedience created. He refuses to leave us alone to suffer the ill effects of poorly-used free choice. He loves us just that much!

*Opening Question***Are all scientific findings true and unchangeable?***Introduction*

Genesis and modern cosmology, the nature and ordering of the Universe – are they congruent? Certainly, the Bible makes no claims to scientific accuracy, yet it contains astronomical references, as well as metaphors and similes explaining God’s creation. How should we understand the language? Some people attempt to take all of the Bible literally, including the poetic imagery. Contemporary scientists rightly laugh at such approaches. But what of the language that is straight-forward, prose, or prophetic-oracle that isn’t poetic? Does it harmonize with what we know today? To what degree must modern science’s work of forensic analysis—studying evidence from the past with no ability to carry out actual, reproducible experiments necessary to be called true science—include sources like the Bible to make sense of earth’s origins?

*Genesis 1-2 (again!)*

Some scholars seek to set Genesis in its historic context by comparing it mainly with other origin accounts from Mesopotamia or surrounding regions. It’s not hard to find similarities to some of these, but the differences are profound. In these chapters, Yahweh God is a creative, orderly being, outside of time, who only makes good (or *very good*) things. There is no fighting among members of a pantheon of gods, which spills over to earth and spawns humans as servants for the divinities. Rather, people are a special act of hands-on, home-made creation by a gracious, personal Being, set in a place of rich, fertile beauty, incredible living diversity, and wealth of gold. Restrictions are few, freedom is high. Relationship is valued. The story is valued for both its simultaneous simplicity yet profundity. Occam’s Razor certainly finds application here.

**How should Christians handle ancient creation stories that have similarities and differences with the Biblical accounts? Is there a place, beyond curiosity, for them in faith or apologetics (defense of a certain faith perspective)?**

The Fine Tuning Argument (FTA) states that the universe generally, and the earth specifically, only allows life because it exists within a very narrow set of physical parameters. It could not sustain life if even one variable of the universe were off by so much as a fraction of a fraction. If the earth were just a bit closer to or further from the Sun in its orbit, if gravity were only slightly heavier, or if water froze at just a degree more, or ionic bonds were a tad weaker, etc., there could be no life. In fact, the habitable zone for life in terms of nearness to a star with outer solar-system planets protecting it from asteroid bombardment is so narrow, and the conditions for a single planet to also have the right chemical mix to grow life, means the chances of finding another earth, even in the vastness of space, is exceptionally small, say some astrophysicists. While that may be a bit depressing, the good news is that there is one, and we’re on it!

**How much evidence should it take to convince someone that we're not here by chance, that only an intelligent designer could create the types and styles of matter around us, and also give consciousness, that is the ability to give *meaning* to information?**

### *Genesis 5-11*

Much could be discussed from these chapters, but several points should be made. First, the stories of Genesis 4 that aren't highlighted in the quarterly are actually fundamental to much that comes later. The story of Cain and Able will be alluded to in Revelation, as will *the mark*. As Genesis begins the Bible, Revelation shows that history will repeat itself as the Great Controversy concludes. Second, the quarterly seems to be on quite a crusade to justify a literal creation, and to accept the absolute historicity of scripture; perhaps the authors sense this is the single, largest lesson from Genesis that must be taught and conceded by the church and those outside. While it is certainly important (moreso among academic circles, it seems), the amount of space the lesson dedicates must therefore exclude many other important lessons which might actually give evidence for the inspiration of Scripture, of God's mighty acts, and man's needed moral response.

The genealogies that trace Cain's and Seth's lineages form the first of many Biblical family lists. While these appear to be actual bloodlines, not lines based on character or Godliness, it is often held that the two lines demonstrate the faithful (Seth) and the apostate (Cain). Jesus will often speak of either children of God or of Satan, that there are only two lines. (see John 8:44).

The genealogical records before the flood and immediately after give evidence of a seamless family line with nothing missing. However, other genealogies in the Bible are missing people, sometimes perhaps intentionally (see Matthew 1 and his groupings of 14 names compared to Luke 3, and the rest of the O.T. genealogies).

**Why might it be significant to theology if there are gaps in the pre- or post-flood family lists? How does it affect faith if there are actually no gaps? Can we be sure either way?**

### *The Flood*

There can be no question that if the flood was the actual event listed in Scripture, there should be significant evidence of such a catastrophe throughout the geologic strata. That is exactly what we find. Every one of the top layers of earth's crust is sedimentary rock laid down in such a way that it immediately covered huge amounts of living organisms, some larger than we've ever seen alive today. Only huge amounts of water could have done such a thing, all across the earth, and at one time. There is much we do not know about that event (or maybe multiple events including the dividing of earth in the days of Peleg), but water there had to be, and LOTS of it!

### *Closing Comments*

Apart from Scripture, scientists are left to speculate. With how many theories have come and gone, there is still much to be proposed. Perhaps someday the two will see eye-to-eye!

*Opening Question*

**Does Archeology provide any support that stories in the Bible actually happened, or does it refute the Judeo-Christian faith?**

*Introduction*

The Biblical text is rooted in time, place, and history. This week's lesson focuses on where the biblical text is consistent with known history from outside the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. Many of the events in the Bible depend on their historic accuracy for the doctrines/beliefs that follow (such as the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth), while others may depend less on actual historicity. But the Biblical documents are certainly filled with names of actual places and people.

In contrast, archeologists have, to this point, not found any evidence for the claims of the book of Mormon, that Jews from Palestine settled in South America and built some significant cities there had horses, certain foods, etc. The Book of Mormon, which claims to be a history of Jesus in the Americas, yet it's people take *everything* about the stories on faith.

But for the Christian or Jew today, archaeology frequently confirms Biblical events and peoples to be historically accurate. For many centuries, no mention of King Belshazzar of Babylon was known outside of the book of Daniel, so secular or critical scholars believed the author invented the name. But cuneiform tablets uncovered in Babylon mention him as son of Nabonidus, who took the throne following Nebuchadnezzar, explaining perfectly his offer to make Daniel "third ruler of the kingdom" when the Jewish prophet read the writing on the wall.

*Trust Issues*

Rather than exploring texts directly this week (there are *plenty* in the quarterly!), we'll pose some questions about the historical reliability of the Bible and its literary nature, our faith in its message, and the ways in which we know what we know or believe what we believe.

Assuming the premise that the Jewish and Christian writings composing the Protestant Bible were actually written with as much historical accuracy as possible, yet by fallible humans, what evidence might we expect to find in archaeological digs in Biblical lands, in the writings of other contemporary civilizations (like Egypt, Babylon, or Rome)? Some agreement should certainly be found if enough evidence is uncovered; however, we know some civilizations altered history in their written accounts in order to always appear to be the victor; defeats were not accounted for (as the quarterly mentions about Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem). But Jewish history rarely does this, since much of their histories were composed by prophets who foretold their downfall because of spiritual decline, idolatry, and immoral living. Israel's stories become more believable simply because of the many defeats they include.

**What happens when we base our trust in the Bible only on outside corroborating evidences for its trustworthiness, and then an archaeological find seems to disprove a certain story or Judeo-Christian belief?**

**What are the strongest evidences for the Bible's message? Are they from the fields of literature, biology, geology, archaeology, or the humanities?**

**From what source does faith in God come to us in the first place? Must someone accept the absolute reliability of the entire Bible as a factual history of earth before having a relationship with God or hearing His voice?**

**How can we be both students of the sciences, literature, and history, and still be fully devoted followers of God through His Word when the two sides are sometimes at odds?**

### *Jesus of Nazareth*

An influential academic movement has attempted to discern between the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the “Christ of Faith.” The latter figure of “the Christ” is supposedly an embellishment of the former, Jesus the original Jewish rabbi and sage who walked the earth, perhaps healing some people, but whose teachings and life reached mythical proportions in the Biblical gospels. In other words, this approach denies the historical reliability of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and prefers extra-Biblical gospels such as Thomas to be more accurate to who Jesus was. Many of the miracle events in Jesus’ life can be discarded as legends which developed around their beloved Messiah figure. The resurrection certainly isn’t a historical event, and thus “faith” is only a spiritual experience of taking on the teachings of Jesus. We believe in the Christ that has been presented to us through several centuries of church veneration and exaggeration of his life.

Many of the scholars in this category study with presuppositions tainted by agnosticism or outright atheism. There is plenty of evidence from history that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person. Even most atheistic scholars affirm this. But for them, much of the Biblical accounts are just so much theological ax-grinding, and cannot be trusted to represent the facts of Jesus’ life.

To maintain this position, however, much of the Old Testament must be set aside. It is the Bible’s own internal consistency—a form of study called Canonical Theology—that gives evidence for Jesus’ birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, and ascension. More than 15 times throughout the book of Matthew, he uses the words “it was fulfilled,” and then quotes or paraphrases an Old Testament writer and shows how events in Jesus’ life were foreshadowed, prophesied, or typified in the Old Testament. More will be said about this next week.

**Do a search of a concordance, digital (Accordance/Logos/Bibleworks) or online Bible ([blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org), [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), etc.) and find the “fulfillment passages” in Matthew. In what way does Matthew cite the Old Testament? Why does he see a fulfillment in each of these stories or prophecies?**

### *Closing Comments*

If the God of the Bible didn’t really do the things the texts suggest He (or Jesus) did what is the purpose of trusting in Him? If He didn’t actually part the waters of the Red Sea or calm the storm on Galilee, why should I trust Him to lead me through difficult times? Why should I be willing to die for my faith if there is no future hope of resurrection based on Jesus’ own rebirth from death? Our faith in the promises of God are directly related to our conviction of His ability to *do* what He says. Thus, our own actions, and how we live day-to-day, and the attitudes we bear, are dependent on our trust in Him as reliable, as our rock that cannot be moved.



*Opening Question*

**If you knew someone was a prophet sent from god, would you want to be their friend?**

*Introduction*

This lesson approaches Bible prophecy deductively from an already-formed theological position in order to defend certain conclusions, rather than a more inductive approach of discovering the positions through deep study of the text. This doesn't mean the conclusions are wrong, only that the quarterly's approach will certainly be less attractive to younger people, and maybe thinking people in general. It *feels* more like propaganda than exciting study of Scripture. Nevertheless, here we go: the lesson tackles the following subjects under the title, "Tools of Prophetic Interpretation": Historicism, Year-day principle, The Little Horn, The Investigative Judgment, and Typology as Prophecy

*Historicism: Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 10-11, and Revelation*

About 150 years ago, many North American Protestants used the historicist method for interpreting Daniel and Revelation. Exploring the passages of Daniel listed above gave the rise and fall of a historical sequence of nations: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, division of Rome, and God's Eternal Kingdom. Without any gaps between these nations, the sequence begins with the time of the Biblical writer (Daniel, or John for Revelation) and continues until God establishes His Kingdom on earth.

That Historicism fits with Daniel is fairly clear. Where it becomes less obvious is trying to use it with prophecies outside of Daniel, and parts of Revelation. For instance, attempting to apply a historicist method to Isaiah 61, which Jesus quoted was about Himself being anointed as Messiah, would yield strange results.

When applied to Revelation, there are also challenges. The book is not exactly like Daniel, but rather functions through cycles of sevens (churches, seals, trumpets, Angels, Plague, etc.). Most Adventists have not read the 7 plagues from a historicist method. Why not? What also makes Revelation unique is that the sanctuary structure is also sequential through the entire book, thus it functions in a historicist manner within the Great Controversy narrative of the High Priesthood of Christ.

**Is it fair to say Adventists are "historicist" in their interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, and ignore the meaning of the books—especially Revelation—for the first audience? After all, John clearly writes to and for 7 literal congregations in Asia Minor, as stated in chapter 1.**

*Year-Day Principle*

The common verses used to defend the year-day principle are Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. The argument is that there is congruence between these two time-periods and thus we can apply them to apocalyptic prophecy as well. Is that fair when they are not the same genre? Both are actually narrative, not prophecy, after all. Is there more to this idea than just these two

verses? Actually, the answer is yes. Throughout the Old Testament days and years are often used interchangeably or in highly connected ways. This isn't just some kind of code for which these two verses provide the interpretive key; far from it. Rather, this is a broader Hebrew way of thinking, as for example Gen 5:4 and following verses (in the NASB, KJV, NKJV, or NRS) versions where days of a person were so many years. Coupled with the symbolic and strange way of enumerating time with prophecies like the 1,260 days or 2,300 evening-mornings, we seem justified in using a prophetic interpretation that takes us well beyond the days of the prophet.

**What happens to some of these prophecies if we apply them as literal time, rather than prophetic years?**

### *The Investigative Judgment*

Christians outside of Adventism and some Adventists have struggled with the idea of God judging His people before Christ returns, and knowing who is for Him and who is against. Yet there seems good support Biblically for it. We see this in Genesis 6 before the flood where God investigates the earth, finds its wickedness, and brings an end. It is significant that Noah and his family are safe inside the Ark before the end actually comes. They were "sealed" inside, and the wicked were outside, well before deliverance came.

Another example using the same language is God's investigation of Babel in Gen. 11. God comes to see the high-handed rebellion of the people violating His command to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Thus, God decided ahead of time what He would do, and how to complete it.

**Why do some Adventists push so hard against the idea of the Investigative Judgment? What are they worried it does, especially to the Gospel, or to the doctrine of sanctification?**

### *Typology*

An entire quarter or more could be spent just looking at the types of Christ, His church, and last-day events found in the Old Testament. Since we already looked at some of these earlier in the quarter, we'll leave with a couple hints: examine the Hebrew Sanctuary in Exodus and the Priesthood in Leviticus, then read the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews reveals how the earthly is a symbol, or pattern of the heavenly.

**How many stories in the Old Testament can you think of that hint at Jesus, who He was, His work, ministry, death, resurrection, and final redemption of His church?**

### *Closing Comments*

Adventism's high calling has been tied to its prophetic interpretation, and the clear message of the final day-of-the-Lord judgment of God having begun, that time is running out for people to side with Christ in the Great Controversy. Without this unique calling, Adventism has very little reason for existing as a unique denomination or part of Christianity.

*Opening Question*

**What should I do if I find something in the Bible that is hard to understand or seems to disagree with something else I read there?**

*Introduction*

In a book the size of the Bible, there are bound to be parts that challenge us. This is to be expected, first of all, if it is a book about God whose divine Spirit inspired the writers. Why should we expect anything that originates with an all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal Spirit-being to be limited to simple human terms? More than this, the sheer size of the book and subjects it covers should give us pause before expecting everything to line up perfectly. What is perhaps amazing, then, is how much of the Old and New Testament actually do fit together! The more I study, the more I see parallels of thought, consistent messages, lines of history converging on Christ and God's mighty acts in the world, and His role in my own life as I trust Him day by day. But what happens when we come to passages that seem to be at odds, theological discussions from different points of view, or even proverbs back-to-back that seem to say the opposite thing? What if a description doesn't harmonize with current scientific understanding? Are there steps to make studying these things easier? Should we be looking to protect our faith at all costs? Does any single supposed contradiction mean the Bible isn't God's Word and I should renounce my faith? This lesson is quite helpful, insofar as it goes.

*What Makes a Passage Difficult?*

There are numerous ways we can be challenged by a text, and perhaps each requires a different way of addressing the difficulty. But with each, asking God's Spirit to help, to lead, and to give me a teachable heart seems the correct first step.

*Literary*

1. I don't understand the wording or phrase.
2. Places or people are unfamiliar, or unknown historical background seems implied (what does the name "Maher Halal Shash Baz" mean?)
3. Metaphors or symbolism doesn't make sense ("4 corners of the earth"?)
4. I cannot follow the author's argument well (Paul's metaphor of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians)
5. Parallel passages say different things (one demoniac or two in Gadera?)

Here, Bible dictionaries can be of great help, as can reading a Bible in a different version. Look up the passage in Study Bible, or even a Bible Commentary. There are many sources available online that can answer some of these questions. Of course, learning the original languages can be a huge benefit in Bible study, but this is unreasonable for many people.

*Theological*

6. One's theology doesn't have room for certain texts. For instance, if I believe that the Bible teaches there is not an ever-burning hell, how do I manage texts that suggest that the punishment of the wicked is torture in a lake of fire forever?

7. Modern Science seems to be at odds with a specific Bible teaching. It seems that Geology, Archaeology, Biology and Physics seem to be the most significant areas of agreement/disagreement with the Bible where arguments are made for or against the following Biblical statements or beliefs: creation by God in 7 days, life created ex nihilo (out of nothing) or through evolutionary process, a world-wide flood, miracles like the virgin birth or resurrection.
8. Theological concepts seem beyond my ability to internalize or grasp.

The first piece of advice may be to accept a bit of tension in your theology. There may be passages that never fit our tight package of theological “truth.” Being OK with that and admitting where the challenges to our beliefs lie is mature. However, these should also prompt us to revisit our theology, asking God’s guidance. The difficult passages may be pointing out something we’re missing.

When it comes to science, remember that even scientists can make un-scientific statements at times. Differentiate between them clearly. Second, science has been known in history to be over-simplistic, incomplete, or just plain wrong. Be careful when posturing current scientific arguments against the Bible.

Theological growth happens over our entire lives. I know, understand and believe much more than I did as a new Christian at age 21. Spend time in theological literature or in books on topics of interest and challenge. This will broaden your understanding of God and the Bible. And maybe most importantly, don’t just read books you think you’ll agree with, put out by your own church or pet-authors!

### *Practical*

9. Not knowing when to apply certain advice or laws, or when the letter of one law violates the spirit of another practice
10. A passage calls out a certain action of mine (or culture) as sin
11. A practice/tradition of my church seems to go against other texts of scripture

For most Christians, this is the challenging part. We don’t know where to go or how to act always, in light of certain passages. But if it requires repentance and contrition, ask God for this gift. Don’t wait to admit where you’ve been wrong.

More often, living by faith simply requires courage to make a change personally. Ask God for this courage, and step out in faith. If you can make one change—for instance, becoming generous with the poor or resting on the Sabbath day—do it once, and ask God to help you make it a habit. Within the larger church, this can be a problem because we’d like change today, but our vote only counts as one. Ask God for guidance and patience.

In any of these challenges, we should be like the Bereans in Acts 17. We should continue to study and not give up.

Finally, we should study prayerfully, as the lesson emphasizes. We should pray for understanding and wisdom to read Scripture spiritually. I must ask God for a humble attitude, a willingness for Him to reveal what He wants me to know in His time, and then faith to His timing.

**What other ways has the Bible been a source of challenge to you?**

*Closing Comments*

Difficult passages, once accepted, can be some of the greatest impetuses to deeper study. They can bring clarification and depth to long-held beliefs, offer a change to erroneous understanding and practices, or even alter our entire world-view. Maybe you've never thought about praising God for the texts you don't understand, but this might just be the best place to start!

*Opening Question*

**How has knowing the Bible been a blessing in your life?**

*Introduction*

This lesson really picks up on the last part of last week's study guide. There is no doubt about the Bible's importance. If anything, it's *talked about* in Christian circles too much, and *studied* too little. How can we live with the Bible as a guide for daily life?

*Ways to Keep the Bible Front and Central*

This week, the lesson simply explores ways to keep the Bible fresh and relevant. Here are some of the ways it has worked for me:

- Read new/different Bible versions. Get a copy of the "The Message" or "The New Living Bible."
- Next time you read or hear something you disagree with Biblically, go study the topic in the Bible.
- Use online resources such as Biblegateway.com, Blueletterbible.com or Biblehub.com. Specific study tools like Accordance or Logos are extremely valuable for deeper research.
- When traveling, listen to the Bible on podcast. Some of the dramatized versions are very well done.
- Memorize passages or entire books of the Bible. You will never know it better than when it is embedded in your mind.
- Use the Psalms as part of your prayer time.
- Read books on Bible themes or topics of interest to you. Maybe you are drawn to issues in origins of earth, or the history of Mesopotamia, or the topic of Spiritual Gifts. Amazon.com, the Adventist Book Center, or CBD.com contain a wealth of resources for continued study.

**What do you do when studying the Bible becomes stale, when you can say "I've heard all of this before"?**

*Closing Comments*

I hope this quarter's study has been valuable to you, and a blessing. Much more could be said on the topic of hermeneutics, and one place to start would be to get a good book on Bible Interpretation, such as Lee Gugliotto's *Handbook for Bible Study* or for the more advanced Bible student, Klein's *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (which is far too large to be just an introduction!). May God bless your continued study of His Word!