

# ***How to Interpret Scripture***

## ***Jesus and the Apostles' View of the Bible***

Lesson #3 for April 18, 2020

Scriptures: Matthew 4:1-11; 22:37-40; Luke 4:25-27; 24:13-35,44-45; Acts 4:24-26.

1. How should we view Scripture in our postmodern age? The world has largely rejected Scripture in favor of certain philosophical ideas that question the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Skeptics believe that the Bible is just a collection of merely human ideas. They believe that people who lived in a primitive culture long ago could not possibly understand reality as we do today or contribute in a positive way to our world view.
2. The idea that the Bible might have some supernatural basis is rejected out of hand. Instead of the Bible being God's view of humanity, it is thought of as humanity's view of God. Thus, many regard the Bible as irrelevant in a time of modern philosophy and Darwinian thinking.
3. Seventh-day Adventists reject that position. We see God's hand all through Scripture. In this lesson we will see how Jesus Himself, the living Son of God, and the apostles understood the Old Testament which was all the Bible that they had available to them at that time. Did they speak about the people, places, and events described in the Old Testament as if they were true representations? Would it be safer to follow the example of Jesus and the apostles rather than some modern philosophical ideas?
4. Read Matthew 3:16-4:11. In the original documents of the Bible, there were no separations into chapters or verses. We need to read the last two verses of Matthew 3 in combination with the first 11 verses of Matthew 4. At His baptism, Jesus came up out of the water, looked up, saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove, and heard His Father say: "This is My own dear Son, with whom I am pleased." (GNB\*) At that moment in time, all three Members of the Godhead were present and affirming the divine mission of Jesus. And then, the story goes on to recall the attempts by Satan in the wilderness: **(1) To question that reality of Jesus, (2) To cause Jesus to give up on His mission, and (3) To cause Him to doubt His identity.**
5. And what was Jesus's defense when attacked by Satan? Always, He said, "It is written...."
6. We need to remember that these words that Jesus quoted from the Old Testament were actually His own words given to Moses and recorded in Deuteronomy 1400 years earlier. Those words were a portion of the final instructions given by Moses to the children of Israel before they entered the land of Canaan.
7. Worship is to be given only to Those who are worth it. And no one is worth it except God. Christ would not accept the Devil's implications or doubts or challenges to His mission, even by a thought. Finally, He said, "Go away, Satan!"
8. How should we respond to Satan's temptations in our day? In a similar way? What passages in Scripture could/should we commit to memory and use when tempted by the Devil? How many passages of Scripture have we committed to memory? Jesus did not waste His time giving some complicated argument about why Satan was wrong. He did not respond in anger, maybe even referring to His battle with Satan back in heaven; He simply quoted Scripture.
9. Read Matthew 5:17-20; 22:29; 23:2-3. Later in His ministry, Jesus repeatedly addressed the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, telling the people to accept what they teach from Scripture, but not to follow their example. By these words He implied that they did not really understand the Old Testament Scriptures. Imagine what a shock it must have been to those authorities and

even to the other Jewish people to hear Jesus say those words.

10. But, it is important to note that in all of that, Jesus did not imply any doubt of any kind about the reliability of the Old Testament Scriptures.
11. On one occasion, one of the scribes known as a *teacher of the law* tried to trap Jesus with a question. He asked: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” This was a question which had been argued among the Sadducees and Pharisees and scribes at great length. In a few simple words once again quoting from Moses, (See Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5.) Jesus summarized the teachings of the Old Testament. We notice, furthermore, that the “first great commandment” summarizes the first four commandments in the Ten Commandments; the “second great commandment” summarizes the last six of those commandments. Thus, we see that God’s message is consistent throughout time.
12. Many modern Christian believers have largely thrown out the Old Testament as being antiquated and not relevant to their lives. They believe that their gospel is found exclusively in the New Testament. But, when questioned about that very issue, Christ quoted directly from 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*\* 39.1-40.0.‡

13. If we have before us all of Scripture plus these clear testimonies from Jesus Himself about the reliability of Scripture, what other competitive source of authority could we possibly quote that would overrule His example? Are there some philosophical considerations that outweigh the authority of Scripture? Some cultural issues? Teachings from some honored professors? (Compare Luke 18:31-34.)
14. Even after His death and resurrection, Christ still pointed to the Scriptures as the authority that we should follow. Read Luke 24:13-35,44-45 which relates the walk to Emmaus.
15. This is an amazing story. Imagine God Himself, having moved beyond His human history, hiding His identity as He talked with His extended group of disciples. So, instead of just rejoicing that He was alive, they would listen to His words burning within them and recognize that: (1) The Old Testament clearly prophesied what is in the New Testament; and (2) The life of Jesus, His sufferings, and His death were all the fulfillment of so many prophecies in the Old Testament.
16. It is important to note in Luke 24:27 and 24:44 that Jesus referred to “all the Scriptures” and “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44, *NKJV*\*) In this passage Jesus was basically referring to all of what we call the Old Testament. From the writings of Moses to the very end of the Old Testament should be regarded as the Word of God and authoritative. The Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-3,14) relied on the authority of Scripture to explain so many things in His life.
17. And what did Jesus tell us to do? Did He have any memory of what He had said in the events recorded in the Old Testament?

**Matthew 28:18-20:** <sup>18</sup>Jesus drew near and said to them, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The*

*Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Matthew 28:18–20). New York: American Bible Society.

18. If Jesus repeatedly quoted from the Old Testament and stated plainly that He accepted all of the Old Testament Scriptures, what possible reason could we give for rejecting even a portion of them?

19. Jesus not only quoted Scripture from the Old Testament to sustain His arguments but also He used those words of the Old Testament, referring to them as the Word of God.

**Matthew 19:4-5:** <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “Haven’t you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? <sup>5</sup>And **God said**, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.’”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [Who first spoke those words?]<sup>‡</sup>

20. Look at passages like Matthew 12:3-4; Mark 10:6-8; Luke 4:25-27; 11:51; and Matthew 24:38. There is no suggestion or hint in any of these references by Jesus that the events He was speaking about did not really happen.

**Matthew 5:12:** “Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Matthew 13:57:** And so they rejected him. Jesus said to them, “A prophet is respected everywhere except in his home town and by his own family.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> [Compare John 1:11.]<sup>‡</sup>

**Mark 6:4:** Jesus said to them, “Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own home town and by their relatives and their family.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Matthew 23:34-36:** <sup>34</sup> “And so I tell you that I will send you prophets and wise men and teachers; you will kill some of them, crucify others, and whip others in the synagogues and chase them from town to town. <sup>35</sup>As a result, the punishment for the murder of all innocent people will fall on you, from the murder of innocent Abel to the murder of **Zachariah son of Berachiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar.** <sup>36</sup>I tell you indeed: the punishment for all these murders will fall on the people of this day!”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

21. If Jesus referred to the Old Testament events as historically accurate and reliable, what could possibly have caused so many modern, professedly-Christian believers in our day to doubt them?

22. One might possibly get the idea that while Jesus referred to these things from the Old Testament and spoke of them as authoritative, perhaps His disciples and apostles did not. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Acts 4:24-26:** <sup>24</sup>When the believers heard it, they all joined together in prayer to God: “Master and Creator of heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is in them! <sup>25</sup>By means of the Holy Spirit you spoke through our ancestor David, your servant, when he said:

‘Why were the Gentiles furious;  
why did people make their useless plots?

<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth prepared themselves,  
and the rulers met together

against the Lord and his Messiah.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Acts 13:32-36:** [Paul said:]<sup>32-33</sup> “And we are here to bring the Good News to you: **what God promised our ancestors he would do**, he has now done for us, who are their descendants, by raising Jesus to life. As it is written in the second Psalm:

‘You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.’

<sup>34</sup>And this is what God said about raising him from death, never to rot away in the grave:

‘I will give you the sacred and sure blessings  
that I promised to David.’

<sup>35</sup>As indeed he says in another passage:

‘You will not allow your faithful servant to rot in the grave.’

<sup>36</sup>For David served God’s purposes in his own time, and then he died, was buried with his ancestors, and his body rotted in the grave.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**Romans 9:17:** For the scripture says to the king of Egypt, “I made you king in order to use you to show my power and to spread my fame over the whole world.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

23. These passages suggest that God is the Creator and that the words spoken to David are referred to as *God’s words*. In Acts 13:32-36, Paul made the same suggestion.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Thursday, April 16.<sup>†§</sup>

24. Should we even dare to challenge the truthfulness of or the reliability of stories from the Old Testament if this was the way Jesus and the apostles spoke of them?

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, par. 5.

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*\* 432.1-3.

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?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, April 17.

25. The Bible—all of it—is a record of God’s interaction with the human race. Everything that God has done is instructive, even if it may not have direct application to our lives today.
26. The Protestant Reformation took as its rallying cry, “Back to the sources.” They, of course, were talking about going back to the Scriptures. Here we have another very reliable and very important group who based their teachings on “Scripture alone,” “*sola Scriptura*.” They referred back to Jesus Christ, and we must do the same.

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.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 39-40].<sup>18</sup>

27. Martin Luther was simply following the example of Jesus and relying completely on Scripture as opposed to the teachings of men, no matter how authoritative they might have claimed to be.
28. We recognize that those temptations of Jesus in the wilderness were absolutely critical to the plan of salvation. How did Jesus respond to each temptation? In His response to the first temptation listed, Jesus quoted a passage from Deuteronomy 8.

“ ‘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’ ” ([Deuteronomy 8:3,] *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*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 40.<sup>†‡§</sup>

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\** 120.1.

29. There have been times in history when people have been severely disappointed in the way things worked out. The disciples were shocked and disappointed when Jesus was crucified instead of being proclaimed king.
30. The early advent believers were severely disappointed on October 23, 1844, when they woke up to discover that they were not in heaven but still on this earth. Later, a careful study of Scripture led them to see that their interpretation was the problem and not Scripture itself.
31. What do you suppose Jesus said to those two devout followers who were walking on the road to Emmaus? Those words that burned in their hearts surely were never forgotten. And when they got back to Jerusalem, don’t you suspect that they reported those passages from Scripture to the disciples in the upper room? Absolutely! Is it possible that the basic outline that Jesus gave them became a kind of template for sermons that the disciples and the apostles preached right through the 1<sup>st</sup> century?
32. In the 1990s, a movement swept through the United States in which young people wore plastic bracelets on their arms or wrists with the letters *WWJD* for *What Would Jesus Do?* Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if many young people had followed through with that question in every aspect of their lives?
33. With reference to this lesson, might it be that we would want to ask a similar question, “What Would Jesus Say?” (*WWJS*)
34. Can you think of times in your own life when quoting a passage of Scripture or recalling a story from the Bible provided an excellent response to a temptation?

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