

# ***How to Interpret Scripture***

## ***The Origin and Nature of the Bible***

Lesson #2 for April 11, 2020

Scriptures: 2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Deuteronomy 18:18; Exodus 17:14; John 1:14; Hebrews 11:3,6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

1. How should we approach the Scriptures? Should we read the Bible as we do any other book? No! Inspired Scripture is different from any other kind of literature. Just as scientists need to receive special training to understand an experiment in their chosen field, Bible-believing Christians need to approach the Bible with an attitude of faith. Approaching the Bible in a skeptical manner with doubts immediately suggests that one is choosing to judge the Scriptures rather than allowing the Scriptures to instruct him/her.

2. What do we know about the divine revelation of the Bible?

**2 Peter 1:19-21:** <sup>19</sup> So we are even more confident of the message proclaimed by the prophets. You will do well to pay attention to it, because it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the Day dawns and the light of the morning star shines in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> Above all else, however, remember that no one can explain by himself or herself a prophecy in the Scriptures. <sup>21</sup> For no prophetic message ever came just from human will, but **people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., 2 Peter 1:19–21). New York: American Bible Society.<sup>†</sup>

3. What does it actually mean to say that prophets and apostles *were moved by the Holy Spirit* to write what they wrote? (Think of Jonah and Ezekiel.) In that case, who was the actual Author? Did they invent those ideas themselves? God worked in various ways to give visions, dreams, and lived-out parables to illustrate the truths He was trying to teach.

**2 Peter 1:16:** We have not depended on made-up stories in making known to you the mighty coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With our own eyes we saw his greatness.—*Good News Bible*.\*

4. If we refuse to accept the idea that God is behind the writing of the Bible, then the Bible will be of very little use to us. But, many people have been transformed, and their lives have been changed by reading even a portion of Scripture. When we say that God is the ultimate Author, that is the reason we call this book of 66 smaller books, the *Holy Scriptures*. (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15)
5. Do we need more help than just a printed book? The Holy Spirit who inspired these writings also is available to us today to help us to interpret and to understand what has been written. What better help could we possibly ask for? Do we read it often enough?
6. How can we be sure that we are interpreting the Scriptures according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and not just our own opinions? We need to share and learn with others.
7. How do you think God chose what He wanted to reveal? The Bible is not just a book of “do’s and don’ts” or “deeds to be done and sins to be shunned.” It tells God’s story in the

context of human lives. But, sometimes it seems hard to obey or do what God asks us to do! Think of Jonah! At times, do you find it difficult to believe and obey what the Bible says? Do you have trouble interpreting some of the sections of the Bible? God claims that what is written in the 66 books of the Bible—from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21—was written under His inspiration. How should we relate to the Apocrypha?

**2 Peter 1:21:** For no prophetic message ever came just from human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Deuteronomy 18:18:** “I will send them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will tell him what to say, and he will tell the people everything I command.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

8. Deuteronomy 18:18 has some interesting words for us. We have traditionally understood this passage to refer to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ Himself. Does that explain what the relationship was between Jesus and His Father while Jesus was on this earth?
9. We need to carefully separate in our minds what is *inspiring* and what is *inspired*. Some charismatic speakers may move us to do all kinds of things. We might call them inspiring; but, that does not make them inspired as if what they speak has come from God.
10. God has used many different ways of revealing the truth to His inspired authors. See Joshua 10:13 in which Joshua quoted from the Book of Jashur. And look at Luke 1:1-3 in which Luke tells us how he gathered information from those who were eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus.
11. How do we define the word *Scripture*? We need to be a bit cautious about calling all of Scripture “inspired.” In the original language, the word *scripture* meant anything that had been written down. It is only the divinely-inspired Scripture that comes from God and is truly profitable.

**Romans 15:4:** Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.—*Good News Bible*.\*

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

12. Today, there are those who call themselves biblical scholars but who deny the accounts of creation, the exodus, and even the resurrection of Jesus! Why do you think they do that?
13. Do we have sufficient evidence to believe that the Bible, all of it, is a reliable source of information on which we can base our trust in God? What kind of evidence is most convincing? Is it the internal consistency of the Bible? The findings of archaeology which support the Bible? The interpretations of biblical scholars? It is all of these!
14. Moses was one of the earliest authors to use an alphabetical form of writing; that made the messages much more precise than earlier methods of writing with cuneiform or

hieroglyphics.

15. Read Exodus 17:14; 24:4; Joshua 24:26; Jeremiah 30:2; Revelation 1:11,19; 21:5; 22:18-19. Repeatedly, we see in these verses that God told His faithful servants to carefully write down what He had told them. Was God dictating?
16. Why is the written Word such an important part of our religious lives? It serves as a constant reference point for us to which we can come back. It can be copied again and again. Now that we have printing, it can be copied many times exactly the same. It can be made available to many people and can be translated and reproduced in many languages. It has proven to be a massive blessing to us even generations later.
17. One of the interesting pictures we see in Scripture is the similarities between Christ and Scripture.  
**John 1:14:** The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>  
**John 2:22:** So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>  
**John 8:31-32:** <sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to those who believed in him, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; <sup>32</sup>you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>  
**John 17:17:** "Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>
18. So, Jesus and Scripture are similar in many ways. Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit; but, He was born of a woman. Scriptures, as we have them, were of supernatural origin, but, were delivered through human beings as well. Jesus became a man in time and space. He lived in a certain place and a certain time. That did not nullify His divinity. The Scriptures were given in a certain context, in a certain culture, and in a certain language. But, their impact has been worldwide and ongoing.
19. There is still about 5% of the world's population that does not have any portion of the Bible available to them in a language that they can easily read and understand. Some groups do not even have a written language yet! Do we need to do something to correct both of those problems? If salvation can be found only through Jesus Christ, (Acts 4:12) how much are we doing to make the Scriptures understandable and available to all around us, even the 5% who now have no Scripture in their language?
20. Jesus came to this earth and made Himself a part of the human family. He accepted humanity after 4000+ years of degeneracy. In the same way, the Bible is not given in some perfect superhuman language that no one is able to speak or understand. While human language always has its limitations, God still uses it to communicate His will to human beings.
21. No language is perfect, and no language can be perfectly translated into any other language. But, we need to do our best to accommodate our thinking to these limitations

and still see God's overarching message through it all.

22. While there are interesting similarities between the Bible and Jesus, the Bible is not an incarnation of God. Neither Jesus nor God is a book. We respect and love the Bible because of the Person it reveals to us.

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy\** v.4 (Introduction).

23. Human authors may produce written materials that are impressive and inspiring; but, that does not make them equal to the Bible.
24. Hebrews 11:3,6 tell us that in order to understand the Bible and to please God, we must have faith. Why is faith necessary in understanding and appreciating Scripture? What does faith have to do with believing that God exists and that He will someday reward those who seek Him. To get an answer to that, we must remember that:

*Faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be. [We cannot say, "will be" because we remember the story of Lucifer!]

*Faith* implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. [Acts 16:31]

*Faith* also means that, like Abraham, [Genesis 18:22-33] Job, [Job 42:7-8] and Moses, [Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25] God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"—As Spoken by A. Graham Maxwell. [Content is as stated many times in his lectures. Content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]<sup>†</sup>

25. Honestly, we can say that all true learning happens in the context of faith. The small child believes (has faith in) what his parents teach him whether or not it is true. Teachers have an impact on students because by one method or another they get their attention and convince them that what they have to say is important. Seventh-day Adventists have produced a book seeking to explain our most important beliefs. The very first fundamental belief that is mentioned talks about this issue.

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme,

authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Thursday, April 9]; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2018. 11.

26. There are many passages in Scripture which tell us that God's Word is reliable. See Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 30:5-6; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12; and 2 Peter 1:20-21. So, what difference does it make if we approach Scripture with an attitude of faith or an attitude of skepticism? People find what they are looking for. And let us not forget that **the same One who inspired the Scriptures—the Holy Spirit—is needed to help us understand the Scriptures as we read and study them.**

**In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will.** They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.... Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy\** vii.1-2 (Introduction).<sup>†</sup>

27. God has revealed Himself to us as human beings through dreams (Daniel 7:1); visions (Genesis 15:1); signs (1 Kings 18:24,30); and through His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). And, finally, the Holy Spirit has to inspire us to understand what we read.
28. If you begin looking at some commentaries, it is very clear that the parts of Scripture which speak most plainly about God's creative power and His ability to predict the future, which Isaiah 40-55 tell us about, are the most important parts for understanding who is the true God. And these parts are the ones most attacked by critics. This applies especially to the book of Genesis in which creation and the flood are discussed as well as the book of Daniel which speaks most convincingly of long-term prophecies.
29. When all is said and done, of course, for many people the only revelation of God will be through you. Do you as a Christian represent God correctly? How well do we do that?
30. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. God still has a lot of things to teach us. And He is preparing wonderful things for us in the world to come. But, now He makes His secrets known to us through His Spirit.
31. Do we allow the biblical authors to speak for themselves and for God without our doubting them? They clearly claim that their messages were not self-generated.
32. If we say that one needs to approach the Bible with an attitude of faith, then why does it say in the Bible that our faith is built on the Bible? (Romans 1:16) We recognize that it is hard to wrap our human minds around this idea; but, we must recognize that the Bible is

a divine-human document. It is not just an ordinary book. Imagine if the Bible as we have it had been written by those same 40 authors just telling their own stories and what they thought about God down through the generations. Of what value would that be?

33. But, we believe that behind every story and in every book, we can see God. In order to understand the Bible correctly, we must allow the possibility that God is behind it all. Are we willing to accept that possibility? If we choose to throw out some parts of Scripture because we do not like what they say or we cannot understand them, then we are placing ourselves above the Bible. We would be judging it instead of allowing it to judge us!

**1 Thessalonians 2:13:** And there is another reason why we always give thanks to God. When we brought you God's message, you heard it and accepted it, not as a message from human beings but as God's message, which indeed it is. For God is at work in you who believe.—*Good News Bible*.\*

34. Of course, we immediately recognize that God's highest and most explicit revelation was in the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has spoken repeatedly through the different parts of the Old Testament and the New Testament. When we see expressions like *the word of the LORD* or *thus says the LORD* or even *words that the LORD spoke*, do these give us a clue to what kind of Author was behind each writing?

35. So, why do you think God chooses to represent Himself through human thoughts and words? Only through words can we have access to thoughts. Thus, inspiration encompasses thoughts as well as the end product of those thoughts—the written words of Scripture. What if God personally would spend 15 minutes or so each week with each one of us. Wouldn't Satan demand equal time?

“Whether inspiration should be attributed to the inspired writers or to the Scriptures written by them is to a large extent a needless dilemma. It is clear that the primary locus of inspiration is in people. The Holy Spirit moved upon people to speak or write; yet what they spoke or wrote was the inspired word of God.”—Peter M. van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration” in Raul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 39.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 28].

36. We have to be willing to accommodate ourselves to the idea that the Bible was not written nor did Jesus live and die in our culture or in our time. We need to expand our thinking to try to understand and accept what were the norms and the ideas that moved people as they wrote the Bible or as they lived out their lives alongside Jesus. Can we do that? Jesus was a real Human Being. And we need to recognize that the life and death of Jesus was the focal point of the Scripture. Of course, we look forward to His coming again.

37. So, ask yourself: Where and how are you tempted not to follow the Bible because of personal experiences and feelings that draw you in a different direction?

38. How are we supposed to gain an attitude of trust toward the Bible? Are we prepared to let God speak through His Word? Are we willing to accept His ideas as being better and superior in every way to our own?

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