Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2026: *The Gift of Prophecy*
Lesson 8 "Interpreting Prophetic Writings"

Read for this week's study

Matthew 5:17-48; 1 Corinthians 16:20; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 10:25-28; Luke 24:25-27, 44-49.

Memory Text

"Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things written about Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27, NASB).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

I. Introduction
II. The Bible, Its Own Interpreter
III. The Historical-Cultural Context
IV. The Literary Context
V. The Meaning of the Text
VI. Biblical Exposition
VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration
Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. "Christ solved the misunderstanding of these two disciples by explaining the Scriptures to them from a broader perspective (Luke 24:25-27). […] These experiences highlight the positive results of correctly understanding prophetic writings. A false understanding of prophecy can lead to spiritual disaster." (Sabbath afternoon)
2. What is Jesus doing with the two disciples in Luke 24? His frustration with them is not that they *believed* what the prophets had said about Jesus and now his death stopped *that* plan from proceeding smoothly. His frustration is that they *have not* believed what the prophets had said about Jesus! His frustration with them is that they interpreted the prophets through the majority interpretation of the day and did not rise above it in spite of the time spent with Jesus during his earthly ministry.
3. For these disciples, Jesus' death is the end of hope. But for Jesus, his death is not the end of hope; it is actually the beginning of hope. For Jesus, everything about the cross and the crucifixion and his death can be explained from the Hebrew Scriptures. What did Jesus achieve with his interpretation? What was the main purpose of it?
4. What did Jesus do with the teachings of the Old Testament in Matthew 5:17-48? (Sunday's lesson) *Abolishing* and *fulfilling* were common ways of speaking about the Torah in Jesus' day. When people were discussing the Bible and trying to figure out

what it looked like to live by its principles, if someone suggested a misguided interpretation, they would be told, "You have abolished the Torah!" And if there was an agreement that this is what it looked like to live by the Torah, people would say, "You have fulfilled the Torah!"

5. How is Jesus moving from *interpretation* to *incarnation*? What can we learn from his attitude towards violence (Jesus never quotes Judges!), divisions among major people groups (Samaritans, women, lepers), clean and unclean, or people who are going to be judged harshly by God? Why do people take him outside of the village and try to kill him? (Luke 4:16-30)

6. Why is considering the historical-cultural context (Monday's lesson) and literary context (Tuesday's lesson) and the meaning of the text (Wednesday's lesson) important? (Isaiah 65:20; 1 Corinthians 16:20; Psalm 91:11-12; Matthew 5:48 cf. Luke 6:36)

7. What is the goal of biblical exposition? (Thursday's lesson) What does it mean when Jesus tells his disciples that they will be binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19; 18:18)? *Binding* and *loosing* was a first-century way of talking about interpretation. How is this an *invitation* from Jesus to put flesh and blood on the Bible in their time, place and culture (Acts 8:26-40; 10:1-48)

8. Howe does this apply to the writings of Ellen G. White? (Friday's lesson)

9. In two to three hours (7 miles/11 km), and using nothing but the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus was able to convert his disciples' despair to hope and give them a vision of a new future. In Jesus' day, some people could read, study, and discuss the Scriptures their entire lives and still miss its central message. In Jesus' day, other people could follow him, learn from him, drop everything to be his disciples, and yet find themselves returning home, thinking Jesus had failed.

10. Life's disruptions can often be the catalysts for our growth. But just like the two disciples on the Emmaus road or Peter in Joppa, our travel, meeting people from other 'tribes', reading new things, hearing new perspectives, seeing data or research we have not seen before, we may discover that our previous ways of categorizing and labeling and believing are not adequate. We have a choice: either we ignore or deny or minimize our experience, or we open ourselves up to the very real pain of leaving that old way of understanding behind.

11. It is possible to resist the very growth and change and expanding consciousness that God desires for us to have by appealing to our religious convictions (10:14-15). But God wants us to experience new freedom, new inclusion, a new level complexity. This can be exciting and liberating, but it can also have a traumatic dimension to it. But once you have seen, you cannot unsee. That's the ultimate purpose of interpretation.

12. If you have been handed a way of seeing the world and reading the Bible (and EGW!) that does not work for you anymore and yet that previous way of understanding still has a strange power over you, do not deny the disruptions. They are expansions. That's how God wants you to grow. That's how "the eyes of your heart will be enlightened"

(Ephesians 1:18). And then you can pass it on and help someone else to see the unseen.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

That brings up the fundamental principle of interpretation, which we must use throughout the rest of our conversation, the principle of context. It was the context, it was the setting, that determined the meaning of a passage when it was originally written. To the extent that we can recreate and recover that original setting we are in a position to recover the original meaning.

When Paul says, "I wish you could be as I am. It's all right to marry if you must, but I wish you could be as I am," does that mean that all of us are second class saints if we're married? No, put it in its context. Why did he say, "I would not allow a woman to speak in church?" And why does the Old Testament say, "You cannot boil a kid in its mother's milk"? And then you turn to Judges. That is a stirring time every trip through the Bible. And you read about Samson, filled with the Spirit, killing a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. You read about that fat king and the dagger that was thrust into him. And the dreadful story of the Levite and his concubine.

I brought with me the worst illustration I have ever seen of reading the Bible the wrong way. It is called *The Bible Unmasked*. A man whose avowed purpose was to destroy confidence in the Bible and in God, collected every unpleasant story of immorality and cruelty in the Bible and laid them end to end with the preface, "Would you mothers let your children read this sort of thing?" I brought my more modest printing. I have a later edition that has line drawings in it. I mentioned this in class up at Pacific Union College more than thirty years ago and a student, his name was Winn Paulie, came back with the best answer I have ever heard in all these years. "If you took the medical counselor book and cut out all the pictures of disease; cancer of the lip and tongue, etc., and all the symptoms of disease and printed them all by themselves, it would be a useless, repulsive publication. The only justification for printing those things is that they are always presented in the setting of the remedy."

The Bible is very candid in its depiction and description of sin. But it always presents sin in the setting of the remedy. Otherwise the Bible would not be fit to read. But that's why we must read it as a whole. Do you know that there are two books in the Bible that don't even mention God? Not once. But if you take the whole book and put it in the larger setting, those two books, Esther and Song of Solomon, say wonderful things about our God. You see, to be fair with the evidence we must read it as a whole. Or maybe could I read the statement I wrote at the bottom of the Bible Reference Sheet? After going through 108 times, this is my firmest conviction about the Bible:

> The great purpose of the Bible is to reveal the truth about our heavenly Father that we may be won back to Him in love and trust. This truth, this everlasting good news, is to be found in every one of the sixty-six books. But to discover this truth we must learn more

than just what happened to Samson and Delilah, to David and Bathsheba, to Gideon and his fleece. The all-important question is, what do these stories tell us about God?

If one does not ask this question, much of the content of Scripture may seem unrelated to the plan of salvation, even perplexing, sometimes even contradictory. But when one learns to view the Bible as a whole, there emerges a consistent picture of an all-wise and gracious God who seems willing to go to any length to keep in touch with His people, to stoop and reach them where they are, to speak a language they can understand. And the further one reads on book by book, the more one is moved with love and admiration for a God who would be willing to run such risk, to pay such a price, in order to keep open the lines of communication between Himself and His wayward children.

God will save all who trust Him. But He has not asked us to trust Him as a stranger. The Bible—all of it—is a record of God's revelation and demonstration of infinite trustworthiness.

{Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6, "Evaluating The Evidence" recorded February 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG

Lou: That ties in; talking about the Bible and trusting the Bible. What do you say to a person who says, "Look, I just want to take the Bible as it reads! And when I read in the Bible that (as for example in Romans 11:33 in that doxology that Paul concludes there with) 'God's ways are inscrutable. How can anyone know the mind of God?' Now, if I just accept the Bible, why can't I just accept that statement and say, 'Why have conversations about God? How can we even know God? I'll just believe the Bible.'"

Graham: Depending on the person who is saying this, one might reply differently, but let's assume this is a very devout person. He really does accept the Scriptures. I would want to make the most of that. I would want to say, "Well, what about these other places in the Bible? Do you accept those too? Or do you just accept this one? "

Lou: What other places?

Graham: Like places in Romans chapter one that say God can be known. In fact, this individual is accepting one verse in Romans and skipping another one. If that doesn't work, then I might turn to a place that says, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery," and verses like that, until maybe he is shocked into realizing you can't take here a little and there a little.

When you say you accept the Bible, you accept it all the way through. And probably that's what he meant when he said, "I accept God's word. If it says it, I believe it, and that's all there is to it." Then I would want to point to these other verses that say that God can be known—and if He can't

be known, why all this content of Scripture? Why did Christ come to make His Father known? So this use of one little verse can lead us down all kinds of pathways I'm sure he wouldn't want to go.

Lou: So you are saying that the basic attitude of "I want to accept the Bible as it reads," is a good attitude provided it takes the Bible as a whole, all sixty-six books, the total message of Scripture.

Graham: Right. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #3 with Lou Venden, "All God Asks Is Trust" recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* http://pkp.cc/3MMCAG

Lou: There's another question in the whole idea of growing up that comes to mind: Here in our congregation, we're all at different ages and different stages of growth. In the church, in the family of God, won't there always be babes in the truth, ones that need to grow up, new converts, shall we say, maybe not chronologically, but experientially? How could it ever happen that everybody will come to the precise point, "Ah, everyone is grown up right now." What are you saying with this, what is God waiting for?

Graham: That's why earlier on we spent time on perfection. We've put perfection clear out of sight and made it almost unattainable, whereas perfection is growing up, God healing the damage done. Everything depends on what it means to be grown up. One does not have to be ninety to be grown up, or fifty or thirty. I'm impressed with the maturity of Jesus at twelve in these matters—so settled into the truth, that when He talked with those theologians of the day, He understood it better than they did. I think we've suggested it takes too long to be settled into the truth, because perhaps we've made the truth too complicated. I think we will be amazed at how youthful people will be, how recently won to this truth, who are immovably committed to it: the truth that God is like this, and not as His enemies have made Him out to be. So I think an understanding of what it means to be grown up and settled into the truth would make this much more attainable at the end.

Lou: I hear you suggesting something at the very center, something simple and yet profoundly important.

Graham: Both of those things, just the way you said it. The simplest statement is about the most sublime truth that holds the universe together.

Lou: I am struck by a bit of incongruity, it would seem, in the Scripture. Where on the one hand, you are talking about us growing up—and then if you turn to the words of Jesus, over and over again He said we should be as little children. And, if we're not as little children, we can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. What do you do with those references? For instance, in Luke and in Matthew where He talked about being as little children and seemed to set up a very high priority on that—and you're saying, "Why don't you grow up?"

Graham: When you are putting it especially in the setting of the audience around, and how they were misbehaving, and He takes a little child and says, "Unless you're at least like this, you'll not see the Kingdom." I don't think we should ever lose that—the trust of a little child—the curiosity, the willingness to listen, the willingness to learn. You remember the Laodiceans are not willing to listen to anything, though they're grown up, it would appear. I think that is never to be lost. But Ephesians also says that while we should never lose those precious qualities of childish interest and curiosity and willingness to listen, we should not remain as children, requiring much protection. We should become adults who can stand on their own. I think it's marvelous to see somebody in his seventies, eighties, nineties, who still has the curiosity, interest and trust of a little child.

Lou: We could think of some, couldn't we? So you say he's talking about certain qualities.

Graham: Oh, yes.

Lou: That does lead to another question: "Is it possible, since you put such importance on the basis of Scripture, on growing up, is it possible for a person to tell that he or she is in fact growing up?"

Graham: Since we've used 1 Corinthians 13 on the list, it would be appropriate to note that in the chapter where he says, "I once thought like a child, but now I've given up childish ways," that all the rest of the chapter is on how a grownup behaves. That is, he loves. That is, love is never rude, never impatient, never arrogant, never boasts—look how little children boast, never insists on having its own way. Am I beginning to behave like a grownup? 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, describes how a grownup behaves.

I think there's an additional thing, too. Why am I behaving like this? Am I doing it because somebody in authority has told me to and He has power to reward and destroy? Or am I sold on the message of 1 Corinthians 13? I love how Jesus behaved that way. I would like to be like Him. I just agree with Him. He doesn't have to tell me anymore not to murder my mother-in-law. I don't like the idea myself, you see. So eventually we do what is right because it is right. That's all part of growing up.

Lou: You are saying, then, that there is a certain legitimacy in evaluating the way we act, the way we feel about other people, for example.

Graham: I think if we see no progress over the past year, we should be concerned.

Lou: Well, I was thinking about how my dad used to put marks on the wall. Did your dad do that?

Graham: Oh yes, had them all over the laundry wall.

Lou: And we were always—I was interested in whether I was growing more than Morrie. Morrie finally went up, surpassed me.

Graham: I lost to my younger brother.

Lou: But there's a certain danger in focusing on our growth, isn't there, to where my whole concern is how am I doing? And I get my eyes off of—

Graham: That's why we need to go back to our earlier Conversation, "God can completely heal the damage done." I mean, how does one grow up?

Lou: You don't grow by trying to grow.

Graham: We grow up into His likeness. But if I'm not thinking about Him . . .

Lou: How can you grow if you're looking at yourself and hoping to grow? And how can you avoid the self confidence that comes in, for instance, with the Laodiceans who feel very content? I suppose if you'd ask a Laodicean, he'd say, "Well, I've really done quite well. I'm growing very nicely, thank you."

Graham: One of the evidences that one is growing up is that one is not becoming arrogant. There's nothing more stubborn than a little child. "My daddy says it, and he's bigger than your daddy, and therefore it's true." I would say it would be a mark of immaturity for a person of advanced years to be so self-satisfied and so arrogantly stubborn about his opinions. That suggests one is still a child. One grows up. One even enhances this quality of a child, the humility, the willingness to listen, to accept correction, to accept instruction. That should become even greater as one gets older. So an arrogant, "I think I've almost made it now," suggests one may not have even started. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #18 with Lou Venden, "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up" recorded June 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* http://pkp.cc/18MMCAG

Further Study with Ellen White

Make the Bible its own expositor, bringing together all that is said concerning a given subject at different times and under varied circumstances. {RH, October 9, 1883 par. 13}

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme—of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for the supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found. {CT 462.1}

In the earth made new, the redeemed will engage in the occupations and pleasures that brought happiness to Adam and Eve in the beginning. The Eden life will be lived, the life in garden and field. “They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” Isaiah 65:21, 22. {PK 730.2}

There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will appear new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects of study to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul. {PK 731.1}

By looking constantly to Jesus with the eye of faith, we shall be strengthened. God will make the most precious revelations to His hungering, thirsting people. They will find that Christ is a personal Saviour. As they feed upon His word, they find that it is spirit and life. The word destroys the natural, earthly nature, and imparts a new life in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to the soul as a Comforter. By the transforming agency of His grace, the image of God is reproduced in the disciple; he becomes a new creature. Love takes the place of hatred, and the heart receives the divine similitude. This is what it means to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” This is eating the Bread that comes down from heaven. {DA 391.1}

It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture (*Redemption: or the Miracles of Christ,* pp. 112, 113). {1BC 1120.5}

The minds of all who make the Word of God their study will enlarge. Far more than any other study its influence is calculated to increase the powers of comprehension and endow every faculty with a new power. It brings the mind in contact with broad, ennobling principles of truth. It brings all heaven into close connection with human minds, imparting wisdom and knowledge and understanding. {OHC 35.4}

We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes. {FLB 13.7}

The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God. {SC 89.2}

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals

to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {SC 105.2}

We must study the truth for ourselves. No living man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who it is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a perfect criterion for us. We are to counsel together, and to be subject to one another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us to learn what is truth. Each one of us must look to God for divine enlightenment. We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God. We must not become set in our ideas, and think that no one should interfere with our opinions. {RH, June 18, 1889 par. 6}

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. . . . Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. {Ed 17.2}

All whom God has blessed with reasoning powers are to become intellectual Christians. They are not requested to believe without evidence; therefore Jesus has enjoined upon all to search the Scriptures. Let the ingenious inquirer, and the one who would know for himself what is truth, exert his mental powers to search out the truth as it is in Jesus. Any neglect here is at the peril of the soul. We must know individually the prescribed conditions of entering into eternal life. . . . We cannot trust the salvation of our souls to ministers, to idle traditions, to human authorities, or to pretensions. . . . The Lord positively demands of every Christian an intelligent knowledge of the Scriptures. {RH, March 8, 1887 par. 1}