

How to Interpret Scripture

The Uniqueness of the Bible

Lesson #1 for April 4, 2020

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 32:45-47; Genesis 49:8-12; Isaiah 53:3-7; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5,51-55; Romans 12:2; Psalm 119:105.

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

There are more than 24,600 extant New Testament manuscripts from the first four centuries after Christ. Of Plato's original manuscripts, there are seven, Herodotus eight, and Homer's *Iliad* slightly more with 263 surviving copies. Hence, we have powerful confirming evidence of the integrity of the New Testament text.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, March 28.[§]
2. Why are there so many more manuscripts of the New Testament than of other famous ancient documents?

The Bible was the first book known to be translated, the first book in the West published on the printing press, and the first book to be so widely distributed in so many languages that it can be read by 95 percent of the earth's population today.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, March 28. [What about the other 5%?][‡]
3. The Bible is amazing in its content and its message. The same God who inspired the prophets and the apostles to write the Bible is still active in our day in the fulfillment of the prophecies and the teachings of Scripture. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 14:16-17; John 15:26; 16:13)

2 Timothy 3:16-17: ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful [Footnote in the printed version as well as in the electronic version: Every scripture inspired by God is also useful] for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, ¹⁷so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 2 Timothy 3:16–17). New York: American Bible Society.[‡]

John 14:16-17: ¹⁶ [Jesus said:] “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever. ¹⁷He is the Spirit who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.”—*Good News Bible.*‡*

John 15:26: [Jesus said:] “The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me.”—*Good News Bible.*‡*
4. What role has the Holy Spirit played in giving us the Scriptures and in teaching us how to read them in modern times? If the Holy Spirit was the One who gave the messages to the

prophets thousands of years ago, wouldn't He be the best One to interpret the Bible to our minds today? The inspiration of Scripture is the most important thing the Holy Spirit has done.

5. Read Deuteronomy 31:30-32:43. This lengthy passage includes some of the very last words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel. Many of the principles that we need to learn even today are included in these words. It even speaks about *God's anger*, and it sounds initially like God was going to zap His people. But, then we discover in Deuteronomy 32:30 (*GNB**) these words: "The LORD, their God, had abandoned them; their mighty God had given them up." These are exactly the words used about Christ's crucifixion in Romans 4:25 and what Jesus Himself said while on the cross as recorded in Matthew 27:46! Imagine finding this description of *God's anger* so far back in biblical history!
6. No wonder Moses felt compelled to make the strong recommendation to the people found in Deuteronomy 32:45-47 (*GNB*):

Deuteronomy 32:45-47: ⁴⁵ When Moses had finished giving God's teachings to the people, ⁴⁶ he said, "**Make sure you obey all these commands that I have given you today. Repeat them to your children, so that they may faithfully obey all God's teachings.**" ⁴⁷ These teachings are not empty words; they are your very life. Obey them and you will live long in that land across the Jordan that you are about to occupy."—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

7. By reviewing constantly the history of God's actions with His people on this earth, it will bring us under the power of the Holy Spirit and ever closer to Him. And we know that at the end of time, a group of people who are totally committed to God and keeping His Word faithfully will stand through the final events on this earth leading to the second coming.
Revelation 14:12: This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.*
8. In John 1 we read the sad story that Jesus came from heaven to reach His own family, His people on this earth, and they rejected Him. He became a Human Being, and they still would not listen to Him. Jesus came the first time, and He will come back again; these comings are the focus of all of Scripture. So, why is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus such an important part of our hopes for the future?
9. The Bible has come to us from a variety of authors written in a variety of places by people under a huge variety of circumstances. Some messages were given to young people like Samuel, David, Daniel, etc.; others to very elderly, John and Daniel. Some people were slaves; others were rulers. Some were ordinary laborers; others were kings! Think of the stories of Jeremiah, Amos, Daniel, Jesus, and John.
10. So, why do you think God chose such a diverse group of people over such a long period of time to write His book for Him? Do we recognize it as a letter from God to us, even in our day? Many of the Bible writers were first-hand witnesses of the events that they reported. Others gathered their information by careful research among those who were first-hand observers. (Luke 1:1-3)

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do His work. **He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, none the less, from Heaven.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** vi.3 (Introduction); *Selected Messages*,* Book 1, 26.[†]

11. One of the things that makes the Bible unique is the fact that a single author, God Himself, inspired different people under different circumstances over such an incredible period of time to write a single message! No one else could have done it that way.
12. One of the unique features of the Bible is the fact that up to 30% of its content is in the form of prophecy or prophetic literature. (See Amos 3:7; Genesis 49:8-12.)

Amos 3:7: The Sovereign LORD never does anything without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets.—*Good News Bible*.*

13. There are many prophecies about the coming of Jesus, His life, and His death found in the Old Testament. One of the most obvious is found in Isaiah 53. Why does it say in Isaiah 53:4: “All the while we **thought** that his suffering was punishment sent by God” (*GNB*[†])? In what sense did Jesus suffer because of the evil we have done?
14. The birth of Jesus was predicted in Micah 5:2. The beginning of His ministry was predicted in Daniel 9:24-27 as was His death three and one-half years later. His coming to Jerusalem in the form of a King riding humbly on a donkey, the colt of a donkey, was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9. There are at least 65 direct messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. If we add all of the “types” looking forward to the Messiah, then there are many more prophecies. We are even told that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah”; (Genesis 49:10) but, the fact that there are so many prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament is mirrored by the fact that Jesus Himself often pointed out that the events of His life were the fulfillment of prophecies. (See Luke 9:21-22; Matthew 17:22-23; 24:1-2; John 14:1-3.)
15. Of course, **in reviewing all these prophecies and their fulfillments, we need to think about why Jesus had to die. This is the most important question in the Bible.** The purpose of the life and death of Jesus was not just to pay some price that God demanded before He would save sinners! **Jesus came and lived and died to demonstrate the truth to us and the whole universe about God Himself. In order to do this, He had to directly refute through His life and His teachings the many misrepresentations and lies from Satan.**

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

16. One of the most amazing things about the resurrection of Jesus is that we are promised that if we are faithful, we can experience that same thing ourselves! (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-5,51-55; Romans 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)
17. Not only did the life and death of Jesus fulfill prophecy from the Old Testament but also the New Testament provides multiple eyewitness accounts of those events. Some of the same people who saw Him die also saw Him after He arose.
18. Paul took up this theme and made it very clear that if what we believe about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true, then our hopes are in vain and we are believing a

lie. (1 Corinthians 15)

19. Think about the people who saw Jesus die on the cross, and then, two days later saw Him alive! How do you suppose the two Marys, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus, felt when they first realized that Jesus was indeed alive? (Luke 24:34) Was God hiding?
20. **The fact that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared as a Human Being to the disciples on several occasions is proof that God has the ability to raise us even if we sleep in the grave.** If we did not have this promise, we would be no better than the atheists who believe they will die and stay dead forever.
21. There are several occasions recorded in the Bible when the teachings of the Scriptures had been lost sight of for some period of time, and then, when rediscovered led to a genuine reformation. Read 2 Kings 22:3-20. When Josiah, the young king, was shown the scroll that was found in the temple and portions of it were read to him, he tore his clothes because he recognized how far God's people had fallen from His plan for them. Josiah then pursued a campaign to destroy all the pagan worship places where the Baals and the other pagan gods were worshiped throughout the land. They began by cleaning up the temple itself. What an incredible response to the reading of the Bible! What do you think would happen if a portion of Scripture were read aloud on a downtown street in a major city in our world today? Would anyone even pay attention?
22. One of the most amazing proofs of the uniqueness of the Bible is its ability to transform lives even in our day.

John 16:13: ¹³ [Jesus said:] "When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come."—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Romans 12:2: Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

23. In order to be effective, the Bible must be read and understood individually by each one of us. It is not enough to accept the teachings of some spiritual leader, no matter how gifted that person may seem to be. What does it take to bring this about?
24. Terrible times are ahead of us.

The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 593.1.[†]

None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great [594] conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?—*The Great Controversy** 593.2-594.0.[†]

25. And what should be our response?

It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.—*The Great Controversy** 598.2.

26. So, what does God have in mind for us?

He came to the world to display the glory of God, that man might be uplifted by its restoring power. God was manifested in Him that He might be manifested in them. **Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 664.4.† [Could we perform miracles? Every day of Jesus's public ministry and perhaps every day of most of His life was planned with the Father.]†

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.—*The Desire of Ages** 668.3.† [Could this actually happen?]†

Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. **Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.**—*The Desire of Ages** 671.2.†

The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.—*The Desire of Ages** 671.3.†

27. So, why do you think so many people have been willing to live their lives, even to die a martyr's death, because of what they have learned from the Bible? Will we stand faithful for the truth and even be willing to die, if necessary, for what we have come to understand from Scripture? (See Philippians 2:5-11.)

28. **One of the most compelling reasons for believing the Scripture is God's ability to create out of nothing and, thus, His ability to re-create us when the time comes.** He also has the ability to predict the future far in advance. These two arguments are spelled out in some detail in Isaiah 40-55.

29. If, in fact, we believe that the life and death of Jesus are the high points of Scripture, are we able to spell out in clear and distinct lines why Jesus had to die?

30. How many places in the New Testament can you think of where Jesus specifically mentioned the fact that His life and His death would be a fulfillment of prophecies from the Old Testament? (Luke 24:44; John 5:39)

31. Let us begin to summarize.

A number of important elements make the Bible unique when compared to other religious books. Four elements, in particular, stand out in stark contrast to the philosophical and esoteric thoughts of the likes of Confucius, the Quran, and the Hindu sacred writings: (1) the Bible comprises up to 30 percent prophecy and prophetic literature; (2) the Bible is constituted in history, that is, it speaks of a God who acts in history; (3) the Bible events are placed in a spatial dimension of real geographical places, and (4) the Bible has the power to transform lives because of the God who speaks to us through His living Word. Is it any wonder, then, that for centuries it has inspired the greatest works of music, art, and literature? This week we will study why the Bible is unique and unrivaled and remains so, even with the fast growth of technology and knowledge in the twenty-first century.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 13.

32. We live in a world full of audiovisual materials intended to continually distract us. How can we set aside these distractions when it comes time to study Scripture and to study God's Word? How much time do we spend doing so many other things in comparison with how much time we spend studying the Scriptures?

33. One of the things that makes the Bible so believable is **the story-like nature of the text**. Many specific geographical locations are mentioned in almost every part of the Bible. Many of these locations: (1) have been discovered, (2) have been excavated, and (3) are known to fit the biblical story. There are more specific geographical locations mentioned in the first 20 chapters of Genesis than there are in the entire *Quran/Koran*! All of these things help to make the Bible seem and be very real.

34. One example is the town of Bethlehem. The word *Bethlehem* means "the house of bread." There, Ruth met Boaz, got married, and had a son named Obed. That son was the father of Jesse and the grandfather of King David. David would establish a dynasty which will continue forever. There, the One we know as "the Bread of life" (John 6:33-51) was born. Notice how a chain of biblical places such as Bethlehem tie the stories together.

35. Modern archaeology also has demonstrated the proof of even many of the stories in the Old Testament. Josiah began to cleanse the land of the worship of pagan deities. We now can dig up the ruins of some of those temples that were probably destroyed by Josiah and his associates in his day.

36. How do all these facts help to confirm your trust in Scripture? Based on previously fulfilled prophecies in Scripture, are you sure that the prophecies in the Bible about upcoming events in the last days can be relied upon?

37. God wants to transform His people into Christians who are Christians truly in name and deed. In a small way, could we actually come to be like Jesus Himself through a careful study of the Bible under the guidance and transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

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