

Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today
The Voice from Heaven

Lesson #1 for April 7, 2007

Scripture: Genesis 3:8,9; 2 Samuel 12:1-7; Isaiah 59:2; Jeremiah 38:14-19; Ezekiel 4; Amos 3:7; Matthew 11:27; 23:37; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 3:1.

1. How does one find out about God? Where should one go to investigate the Deity? Many claims have been made down through the centuries and millennia about God. How can we decide which claims are reliable and on the basis of what kind of evidence?
2. Almost every religion has some form of scripture. Is the Bible different from other holy books? Why? Why do we choose to believe the Bible instead of the Koran, the writings of Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Taoism, or even the writings of the Book of Mormon or Mary Baker Eddy? Do we have a carefully-thought-out, reasoned approach to this question?
3. Our word Bible comes from the Latin *biblia* which means books, which in turn comes from the Greek *byblos* which meant book. *The Holy Bible* then really means *The Holy Books*. Are you comfortable with our choice of "the 39" books for the Old Testament and "the 27" books for the New Testament? Have you looked at the Apocrypha and/or the Pseudepigrapha? Why do you choose to believe or not believe these other writings?
4. Christians claim that the Bible is self-authenticating. What does that mean to you?
5. Why do you choose to believe in the Bible? Is it because: 1) Your parents believed it and they taught it to you? 2) It was what you were taught in school? 3) Your friends and your church believe it? 4) The Bible's prophecies seem to have come true? 5) The stories in the Bible are inspiring and some of them are even miraculous? 6) The Bible gives us answers to the most challenging questions for human minds? 7) The Bible has stood the test of archaeology and truthfulness over time? 8) The Bible has had an impact on your personal life and the lives of your friends? 9) It tells us about God and his Son who came to live and die for us?
6. Do you look at the Bible as a friend? Do you really enjoy reading scripture? Why? Or why not? Does it make a difference what translation you are reading? When you read the Bible are you thinking about reasons why you disagree with what you are reading? Should we read the Bible without raising any questions?
7. Are there some parts of the Bible that you have questions about? Are Genesis 1-11 too preposterous to believe? Are you comfortable discussing the virgin birth with your scientific friends?
8. The Bible was written thousands of years ago under a great variety of circumstances by people who spoke different languages and lived in very different cultures than we do today. Can we be certain that we still have the correct words, adequately translated in our day? How certain are you that the words of the Bible are actually God speaking to you? Does God still speak to us?
9. Are there actually errors in the Bible? Or is the Bible inerrant? Were those who copied the Bible and those who translated it into different languages also inspired? What do we do with apparent errors in scripture? What do we do with apparent contradictions? Is the Bible clear and plain in its teachings? If so, why are there so many denominations?
10. Does the Bible make a difference to us in the 21st century? Is it applicable to us at all?
11. **If modern science seems to point to certain conclusions and the Bible to opposite conclusions, how should we respond? How should we weigh these two different types of evidence?**

12. Do you believe that all 66 books of the Bible are inspired? What about the Apocrypha? What about the Pseudepigrapha? Why do you consider these books inspired or not inspired?
13. There are three major monotheistic religions in our world. Most of the people living in our world give at least lip service to believing in one of these religions. Are you certain that the God of Christians is the same as Allah for Muslims or Yahweh for Jews?
14. **Read Isaiah 59:2. In what way does sin make a barrier between us and God?** What is it about sin that separates us from God? What does sin actually do to us so that God must veil his glory? Is it personal sin or corporate sin? As far as we can tell, God does not need to veil his glory before the heavenly angels. There is no evidence that he veiled his glory and power when he spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What about when he spoke to Adam and Eve after the Garden of Eden? What would happen if God appeared to us in his unveiled glory? What has changed? (Read Exodus 33:18-23, but contrast Exodus 33:11) Why couldn't God reveal himself to his best friend, Moses?
15. Can you name several barriers that prevent God from communicating with us directly?
16. Is God searching for us, or do we need to search for him? Why does God say in Genesis 3:9, "Where are you?" Didn't he know where Adam and Eve were hiding? If God knew perfectly well, why does he allow himself to be pictured with such human limitations?
17. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that God spoke through a modern prophet: Ellen G. White. Do we believe that God stopped talking to the human race in 1915 when she died? Will God send another prophet to his people before the end of this earth's history? Is God speaking to individuals in our day? How would you know for sure?
18. Reviewing all that you know from scripture, what is God's preferred way of speaking to human beings? How did he do it back in the beginning in the Garden of Eden? Why cannot or why does not God speak to us as he did to Adam and Eve?
19. How many different avenues does God use to communicate with us? Review some of the ways in which God communicates with us: Through his holy writings (John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21); Through God's modern prophet, Ellen White (Revelation 12:17; 19:10); Through the church (Ephesians 3:7-10); Through nature (Job 12:7-10; Psalms 19); By guiding our lives (Psalms 107:1-8); By direct communication from the Holy Spirit to human beings (John 4:16-18, 26); By the examples of his followers (Corinthians 11:1; 4:16; Philippians 3:17; 4:9); Through the ordinary lives of our family members (2 Timothy 1:5). Can you think of others? Are your life and my life a revelation of the truth about God? Does God communicate with us on a regular basis?
20. If God spoke to prophets and apostles in Old Testament times and in New Testament times, why doesn't he speak to everyone today? Wouldn't that be more direct? Is there a difference between believing in God and believing in the Bible?
21. Read Isaiah 55:6. God pictures himself as near to us at all times. Can God really be everywhere at one time? If God is always right beside us, why does he have to veil his presence so that we cannot see him? **If God, either directly, or through his holy angels, were to speak to us on a regular basis, who do you think would demand equal time?**
22. What was different about the Bible's prophets? Were all of the prophets "saints"? How do you understand 2 Peter 1:21?
23. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* defines a prophet as "a person supernaturally called and qualified as a spokesman for God."—p. 903. How would you determine whether a given prophet was called and/or qualified? Can you think of examples of people called prophets in the Bible who were definitely not representing God correctly? (1 Kings 13;

Numbers 22-25, 31)

24. Read Amos 3:7. Do you believe this verse? What happened between 425 B.C. (the approximate time of Malachi) and the time of the life of Jesus Christ? Did God communicate with the human race during those years? If so, where is that communication recorded? And what about the times from the end of the apostolic age to the writings of Ellen White? Did God reveal to his people everything that he was going to do during those years?
25. Do we really listen to God when we read the Bible or hear it read to us? Sometimes we read about the times of terrible rebellion in scripture, for example, just before the destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, and we wonder how they could have been so foolish! But not everyone had rejected God. Daniel and his three friends grew up in that environment and look what happened when they went to Babylon!
26. Read 2 Chronicles 20:20 and Luke 16:31. Do we really believe in the Bible? Did the Jewish religious leaders in Jesus day believe in Holy Writings? Did they think they believed in the Holy Writings? Could we be deceived into thinking we have a true faith in scripture when we really do not?
27. If someone could spend a week watching everything you do, and perhaps even understanding everything you think and say, would he be convinced that you are a true Christian? That you really believe God's Word?
28. Does God take responsibility for making sure that his message gets through to each generation of human beings? How does he go about doing that? It is sometimes very difficult to carry the full meaning of a passage from one language into another. Even large modern corporations have made serious mistakes in translating some of their most important messages! Take these examples:

When Coca-Cola was first widely marketed in Japan, it was rendered phonetically in characters that literally meant, "bite the wax tadpole." Pepsi's slogan, "Come alive with the Pepsi generation" was translated in Taiwan as "Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead." Only after General Motors introduced the Chevy Nova in Latin America did they notice that "no va" means in Spanish, "it won't go"—not a good recommendation for a car. Kentucky fried chicken's [sic] slogan "finger lickin' good" initially was mistranslated into Chinese as "eat your fingers off." (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p 9)

With such examples before us, are we really being foolish to suggest that the ancient words of scripture can be clearly understood in our day?

29. If you were to choose what is the clearest communication from God through all history what would you choose? Would it be the life and death of Jesus Christ? How well did he represent God? Read Matthew 11:27; John 1:14,18; 14:8-11; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Hebrews 1:1-3. Clearly, the Bible writers believed that Jesus was a very clear representation of the Godhead. **Can we really get to know Jesus in our day? Could you describe the Jesus that you know? How is your picture of God growing year by year? If your picture of God is not changing and growing and improving, are you worshiping a graven image? "Idols" are made in men's minds long before they are carved of wood or stone!**
30. One of the important issues that scholars discuss at length is whether or not **the words** in scripture are inspired or whether it was **the writers** of scripture who were inspired. What difference would that distinction make? Did God dictate to his prophets or are the words that we have in scripture the words of the prophets?

31. Read John 5:39,40. Look at the context of these verses. Is this a command from Jesus for us to study the Bible? Or is this a statement that the scribes and Pharisees were studying the scriptures but they had not read them correctly? Look at different translations.
32. During the human life of Jesus, the Father seemed to communicate with him on a daily, hourly, and in some cases even minute-by-minute basis. Could we have that kind of communication with God in our lives? Do we listen when God speaks to us? Do we live the kind of lives that God wants us to?
33. How does God want us to read the Bible? Here a little and there a little? (Isaiah 28:10,13) By the use of specific, very direct, and plain key texts? By reading the whole context of an individual story and trying to re-create its historical setting as far as possible? In your mind do you believe the doctrines of the Christian church because others believe them? Because you have a key text? Because you have a key passage? Or because you have key books? Do you understand the scriptures well enough so that you could explain your beliefs to someone else?
34. Read 2 Timothy 3:16, (Catholics say this verse proves the inspiration of the Apocrypha); 2 Peter 1:20, 21 in several different translations. Do these passages provide all the evidence we need to prove that the Bible is the inspired word of God? Compare the following examples: The Spiritist's Bible:

"Dear Reader, trust in God who made all things after the council of His own will. The Holy Spirits feel much interest in this work and the spirits who corrected this New Testament desire that the world will receive this correction as coming from them directed by God Himself, which is true. Signed, Jesus the Christ."
The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as Revised and Corrected by the Spirits - 1861

The Book of Mormon: (Moroni 10:4,5,29):

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things...And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true."

35. Could you list the two or three most important teachings of scripture? "The theme of God's love is the focus of the Bible, which is seen particularly through Christ, who came into this world, living as a human being, and died on Calvary. This is the greatest truth of the universe. All major Bible truths, therefore, should be studied from this perspective." (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 14, for Thursday, April 5) Do you agree with this statement? Could you make a statement in your own words about the greatest truth of the Bible?
36. According to Christians, the Bible is the primary revelation of God in history. What does the Bible say to us about God? Is the truth about God the most important message of scripture? Dr. Paul Heubach once said, "The Good News is that God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be!" Why would he make such a statement? Does that tell us something important about the overall theme of scripture?

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