

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

The Final Word

Lesson #2 for April 14, 2007

Scripture: Matthew 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54,56; Galatians 1:11,12; James 2; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:16.

1. Do you consider the Bible to be the **final** source of authority? If so, why? What gives the Bible its authority? Do you believe that the Bible is “God’s Word”? Why? What do we mean when we say, “The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen”? {1SM 21.1}
2. What is it in your mind that gives the Bible its most important authority? Are you absolutely convinced that the Bible represents God’s specific ideas communicated to us?
3. In this lesson we will attempt to answer the following questions:

What does the Scriptures say about itself? What claims does it make about itself and its origins? How did the Bible writers view other books of the Bible? And, most important, what does Jesus Himself have to say about the Scriptures? After all, He—the Lord Himself—would have, no doubt, the final word on the final Word. *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 17. (Sabbath afternoon, April 7, 2007)

4. The Bible is a collection of books written over a span of at least 1500 years by a wide variety of authors. On what basis can we say that these books are backed by the authority of God Himself?
5. We live almost 2000 years after the final passages of the scriptures—as we know them—were written. How could such an old book be “The Final Word”? Are we just deceiving ourselves?
6. On what basis do we choose to believe the Bible? Did Jesus accept the Old Testament as authoritative? What about other New Testament writers? How did Jesus respond to those who misinterpreted the scriptures (the Old Testament) in his day? (Matthew 19:4; 22:29)
7. Read 2 Peter 1:20,21. What does this text mean to you? When we say that people wrote under the control of the Holy Spirit, what does that mean?
8. In modern times the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been blessed by the writings of Ellen G. White. What is the authority behind her writings? Is it the same authority that is behind scripture?
9. The Bible makes some amazing claims about itself. What do we make of those claims? In our last handout, we noted that other books have made similar claims that we say are preposterous. We usually just laugh when we read them! Are the claims of the Bible different? Why?
10. The Bible makes some very interesting claims, especially through the prophets in the Old Testament. How do you understand such expressions as, “the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 1:2, *NIV*), “this is what the Lord says” (Amos 1:3, *NIV*), “the word of the Lord that came...” (Micah 1:1, *NIV*), and “this is what the Lord has revealed to me” (Jeremiah 38:21, *NIV*)? Repeatedly, the Old Testament prophets stated that the messages that they were writing down were given to them from God. Does that make them authoritative? How should we relate to such claims?
11. Read 2 Samuel 23:2; Ezekiel 2:2; 11:5,24; Micah 3:8. Clearly, the writers in each case believed that God was speaking to them directly and that they were passing along an important message. Is it possible that the Old Testament writers were merely delusional? Is there internal evidence for the authority and validity of scripture?

12. Read Luke 1:70 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. The Apostle Peter and Dr. Luke seemed to be quite convinced that God spoke through Old Testament prophets. Do you agree? What do you think it was that convinced them? Read Romans 4:3 and Galatians 1:8-12. Paul seemed to be very convinced that he had received his gospel directly from God, and it had great authority.
13. Do you have the same convictions about every part of the Bible? Are there some parts of scripture that you have doubts about?
14. If, in fact, the scripture represents reasonably accurately the actual ideas or thoughts from God, how should that affect our daily lives?
15. Christians recognize that people whom they associate with may not have access to the scriptures. In fact, the lives of those Christians are the only "Bible" that some people read. Do our lives correctly represent the teachings of scripture? If we believe that scripture is "God's Word," should they?
16. To many Christians who are accustomed to answering questions with key texts, the question about the authority of scripture should be answered simply by reading 2 Timothy 3:16! What is the correct interpretation of that verse? Is it properly translated in all modern translations?
17. We know for a fact that there are lies in the Bible. (Genesis 3:4; 1 Kings 13:18) There are also bits of information that are not truthfully accurate. (Matthew 23:35; compare Luke 11:51) Do even those parts help us to understand inspiration? **Could something that is not true be inspired?**
18. Why would God, the Holy Spirit, and ancient prophets record the lies of the devil (e.g. Genesis 3:4) for us under inspiration?
19. Are the claims of the Bible about its sources only claims? **Is the inspiration of the Bible primarily an assumption that we must accept before we read it, or is it a conclusion that can be based on solid evidence?**
20. In recent times we have heard television evangelists say things like, "God spoke to me in the prayer tower last night." Do such claims validate the source of their information? How do we usually respond to such claims? How should we respond?
21. What do we really mean when we say something is "inspired"? The origin of the word implies that it is "God-breathed." Do we have information about other things in our world that were "God-breathed"? Read Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 33:6. Do we have confidence in the Bible because it claims that the same God-inspired breath that created us and our world also created it?
22. Why doesn't God choose a specific way to communicate with us and always do it in the same way? Why did he choose to speak to so many different people from so many different walks of life under so many different circumstances? (Hebrews 1:1) We have evidence that God appeared directly to ancient Bible writers. (Exodus 3:2-7) He also appeared through angels. (Daniel 8:15,16) Some Bible writers wrote because they were eyewitnesses of events that they believed were God-inspired. (1 John 1:1-3)
23. Moses wrote five books of the Old Testament. We sometimes refer to his writings as "the Word of God." At other times we call them "the Words of Moses." What differences are implied by those two claims. **To what degree were the words determined by the human prophet, and to what degree were the words determined by the divine originator?** With so much variation in style and content, how can we call the Bible "the Word of God"?
24. How would you describe the overall purpose of scripture? Is it primarily a book of deeds to be

done and sins to be shunned? Is it God's rule book, or code book, or blueprint? There are some portions of scripture which we would probably do very well to follow (Exodus 20:3-17; Matthew 5-7). But there are some other portions of scripture that we definitely should not follow (Judges 19-21; 2 Samuel 11). Does God give us permission to go through the Bible and follow the things we think we should follow and ignore those that we don't?

25. One of the questions which arises when we talk about the authority of scripture is understanding how the scriptures actually came to us. The sequence of events might have gone something like this: God spoke through the Holy Spirit to angels who in turn appeared to and/or spoke to prophets who, at that time or at some later time, wrote down what they believed they heard which later was copied many, many times and finally translated into various languages, and ultimately comes to us and we read it as the Bible. Those are a lot of steps to go through!
26. The ancient Jews had a slightly different approach to understanding how the scriptures came to them. Note these words taken from the *Mishnah*, a Jewish Bible commentary written sometime after the Babylonian exile: "Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue" (*'abot* 1:1). **Considering the two different views about how scripture came to us, would you be more inclined to believe the words of Paul because he says that the word of God came directly to him?** But do we have the exact words that the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul? Or do we have the words of Paul about that experience? Is it possible that some of those steps were defective? Is it possible that errors crept in through this process at various points? Do we have any way of trying to determine whether or not errors crept in?
27. In Jesus' day the scriptures consisted of ancient books written on scrolls using a modified Hebrew alphabet. It was the role of the scribes to copy those, to make them available, and to help interpret them for the people. Nevertheless, what was Christ's attitude about the authority of scripture? Read Matthew 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 24:15; 26:54,56; Mark 2:25; 12:36; Luke 4:21. By reading these passages and assuming that they correctly represent Christ's view, we can see that he clearly believed in the stories as presented in the Old Testament—even the stories of creation, the flood, Jonah, and Adam and Eve. He believed that Daniel's prophecy had not yet been fully fulfilled.
28. Read Luke 24:25-27 and John 10:35. What do these verses tell us about the attitude of Jesus toward the Old Testament scriptures? Note carefully as you read these passages that Jesus suggested that the Old Testament stories were really about himself!
29. Some books of the New Testament quote Old Testament passages at considerable length and frequency. Do books such as Romans and Hebrews—which quote frequently from Old Testament scriptures—have more authority than those that simply describe personal experiences in New Testament times?
30. In our day, what forces or pressures do we encounter that might cause us to disbelieve the Bible? What kinds of questions are raised about the authority of scripture? How should we relate to those who question the scripture? Is it wrong to question scripture? To doubt? Should we automatically reject statements made from sources that we have questions about?
31. There is an interesting passage in the writings of Peter found in 2 Peter 3:14-16. Peter seems to have been referring to passages such as Romans 2:4 which were written a few years earlier by Paul. In light of the fact that Peter and Paul were both apparently imprisoned about the same time in the Mamertine prison in Rome, is it possible that Peter was influenced by his intimate

contact with Paul to write those final words of his letter?

32. Some Christian apologists point out that certain themes that run through scripture prove that it has a single author. What are some of those themes? Do you agree with this statement?

“The Bible was written by kings, a prime minister, shepherds, fishermen, prophets, priests, a publican, a physician, and many other people with different occupations—but all of them wrote about the same God. Some books are historical; some are prophetic. Some writers wrote in poetry; others in prose. Some books are missionary reports; others are church letters or personal correspondence. However, each speaks about the same loving and caring God; each one informs us about the same plan of salvation; and each one uplifts the same standard of righteousness. All look forward to the same eternal reward. This is not coincidence. It all shows that the Bible writers have one source of inspiration.” *Ibid* 26 (for Thursday, April 12, 2007)

33. What is the most convincing evidence that the Bible is inspired? Is it the scholarly evidence presented through the documents themselves? Is it the historical and archaeological evidence that has been dug up in more recent times? Is it the impact that the writings of the Bible have had on you and your friends? Is the Bible a living witness to you and through you?

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. **The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen.** Look at the different writers. {1SM 21.1}

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.—Manuscript 24, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886). {1SM 21.2; 7BC 945,946}

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. {GC page v. 1888}

34. Do some versions or translations of the Bible carry more authority, in your thinking, than others? Why? Does the more “holy language” of the King James Version give it more authority? Does the fact that a modern language version is more easily understood give it more authority?
35. What is the ultimate source of all authority? Would it be the truth? If you determined that some source repeatedly and consistently told the truth, would that source come to have great authority for you?

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Last modified: February 24, 2007

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