

Discipleship

Disciples and Scripture

Lesson #1 for January 4, 2014

Scriptures: Luke 4:1-12; Matthew 12:3-8; Matthew 5:17-39; Luke 24:13-32; Acts 1:16-20; John 5:39.

1. About 200 years before Christ was born, a system of synagogue schools was instituted in Palestine. Young boys were expected to attend those synagogue schools at least to the age of 10, but girls were never included. Much of the time was spent in memorizing the five books of Moses—the Torah. After age 10, many of the boys were sent home to learn a trade from their parents. A few select students were allowed to continue until age 15 during which time they were expected to memorize the rest of Scripture, the Old Testament. At that point, most of the rest of the students were sent home and only the very best students were allowed to continue studying the favorite teachings of “the fathers.” If one succeeded in that, he achieved the status of rabbi. It was considered the most honored position in the nation. See <http://followtherabbi.com/guide/detail/he-went-to-synagogue>. But, unfortunately, despite memorizing all that material, the rabbis misread and misinterpreted much of Scripture and missed a correct understanding of the main character—Jesus Christ. In our study of discipleship, we need to understand clearly that the God of the Old Testament was none other than Jesus Himself. (John 5:39; Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4)
2. Read Luke 4:1-12,16-21 which describe the temptations of Jesus and His return to Nazareth, claiming to be the Messiah. To Jesus, as well as to most of the Jews in His day, a definitive answer from Scripture was authoritative. But, not in our day! Working through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was the original Author of the Old Testament. How did He have access to the Scriptures as a child? Jesus learned the Scriptures at His mother’s knee. (DA 70.1) Is that why God picked her? Since girls did not go to the schools, how did she know the Scriptures?
3. Proof that Christ knew the Old Testament very well is shown by His use of the Old Testament as He responded to Satan during the temptations by saying, “It is written,” (Matthew 4:1-11) and later, His responses to the Jewish leaders. (Matthew 21:42; 22:44)
4. On resurrection Sunday, He walked with those two lesser-known disciples to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-35) He opened to them the truth about Himself from the Old Testament, beginning from Genesis. Don’t you wish you had a recording or a transcript of that conversation? Did that conversation form a pattern that the apostles used later in their preaching?
5. Whether we recognize it or not, human beings will worship something. That is, we hold certain things in our lives of maximum worth. It might be your bank account, your house, your car, your social status, your job, your God, or any one of a number of other possibilities. God challenges us to make Him the most valuable thing in our lives and, therefore, to worship Him. If we experience that kind of relationship with Him—the experience called faith—we will get to know Him better and better through Bible study. As we do that, we will be changed. By beholding we become changed. (*Great Controversy*, p. 555)
6. Many Christians view the Scriptures as a codebook of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned. Other Christians view Scriptures as primarily focusing on how we can be saved. But, the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation should be read as primarily a revelation about God. We are all sinners—no questions about that. But, God has been accused of lying and deceiving His children. Satan has made many accusations against God. He even called God a liar! (Genesis 3:1-5) So, the question we need to answer for ourselves as we read the Scriptures is, “Who is telling us the truth?” The most important question in every story is, “What does it say about God?”

7. Read **Matthew 5:17-20**; 12:3-8; 15:3-11; John 10:34-37; **17:14-19**; Luke 24:44; compare 2 Timothy 3:16-17. These are just a few of the texts referencing times when Jesus used Scripture to clarify the truth. Since Scripture was regarded as the ultimate authority in His day, scriptural evidence worked well. In our day, so many people have lost their confidence in Scripture, or never had it to begin with, and have come to regard the Scriptures as nothing more than myth or a book of good moral principles by which one may choose to live his life. One illustration of this was found on a huge billboard posted in Times Square in New York City during the Christmas season in 2012. It pictured Santa Claus beside a picture of Jesus Christ. Underneath it said, "Keep the Merry! Dump the Myth!" In this Christmas season of 2013, one Christian group responded by posting a large billboard also in Times Square which said, "To all of our atheist friends: THANK GOD YOU'RE WRONG." Once again, the question should be: How do we know who is telling us the truth?
8. Have you ever discussed with a Christian friend of another faith whether or not he believes the major miraculous events of Scripture? Creation? The flood? The virgin birth? Or, even the bodily resurrection of Jesus? And what is their response when you talk about a literal second coming? How many of them believe in these things? And if most or all of these things are nothing but myths, why should we care? Why should we dedicate our lives and spend our time studying them?
9. When one of your Christian friends says that the stories in Genesis 1-11 are nothing but myth, what is he saying? The implication is that since there is no way to verify those events archaeologically, they are nothing more than a collection of stories passed down through generations and probably embellished greatly—not a reliable or true account.
10. The book of Matthew is organized more or less topically. There are five great sermons in Matthew. The first one is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Read Matthew 5:17-39. How are we supposed to understand Jesus's numerous references to the Old Testament saying: "It was said..., but I say"? Don't we believe that the Old Testament statements were from Jesus Himself? Why was Jesus overturning those statements? Or, was He? Was He opposing the interpretations that the rabbis had given? A more careful look at the statements makes it clear that Jesus was raising the standard of what He expected of His followers much higher than the Jews had previously done. No legalistic approach to religion would do. Later, Paul recognized that none of us could do it alone. (See Romans 7) But, all three Members of the Godhead are on our side! (See Romans 8:26-31)
11. You can read the Sermon on the Mount in a few minutes. The context seems to suggest that He preached to the crowd for most of the day. Why do you think people were so attracted to His words and His Person?

As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes [that Jesus would liberate them from the Romans]. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. His words fall like "rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth." Psalm 72:6. All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 6. [Content in brackets is supplied.]

12. What is our approach to Scripture in our day? Do we sound more like Pharisees and Sadducees? Or, more like Jesus? Haven't most of Jesus's statements proved to be true?

13. Jesus had a number of encounters with individuals described in the Gospels. Think of His conversations with Nicodemus, Mary, the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, and the rich young ruler. What do these stories tell us about His mission to earth and discipleship? His messages fit each individual. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about Himself in the Old Testament.
14. Read John 13:18-20; Luke 10:25-28; 24:13-32. For example, look at the way Jesus talked to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Beginning at Moses, the very Alpha of Bible history, Christ expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied. In the fullness of their joy they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand the witness borne to Him by the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Upon these their faith must be established. Christ performed no miracle to convince them, but it was His first work to explain the Scriptures. They had looked upon His death as the destruction of all their hopes. Now He showed from the prophets that this was the very strongest evidence for their faith.

In teaching these disciples, Jesus showed the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to His mission.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796-799.

15. Read Luke 24:32 again. What was it that “made their hearts burn within them”? What does that mean? Have you ever heard a sermon or a Sabbath school program that made your heart burn within you? What about when reading the Bible? Or, Ellen White?
16. Why did the religious authorities take such an opposing attitude toward the teachings of Jesus? Read Matthew 12:15-21. Jesus performed a fantastic miracle—healing a man’s hand—and what was their response? They were determined to kill Him because He did it on the Sabbath! And how did Jesus respond? He left the area!
17. Jesus demonstrated repeatedly that He knew how to read peoples thoughts and that He understood not only the Old Testament but its fulfillment in His life and the events surrounding His life.
18. Read Mark 1:1-3; Acts 1:16-20; 3:22-24; **Romans 10:10-11**. It is very clear that Jesus regarded the Scriptures as having ultimate authority. These verses teach us that His disciples came to have the same attitude about the Scriptures. When the disciples finally came to understand what Christ’s mission was all about, it became the absolute focus of everything they did. Could that happen to Christians in our day? Would you say that it was more critical to have that attitude in their day? Or, more critical and important to have that attitude in our day? The apostles went forth after Pentecost—and Paul did the same about a year later—risking their lives and ultimately sacrificing their lives to spread the gospel.

Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies. . . . Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. **By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 221,222.

19. So, as Christians, how should we make use of Scripture today? What would happen if every Christian would kneel by his/her bed in the morning and pray that God would give him/her an

opportunity to witness that day? And what if, like the disciples and Jesus, we were so tuned to the Scriptures that any question that came up we would be able to give a scriptural answer?

20. No doubt, Jesus was a very charismatic Person. He had the power to perform incredible miracles. But, when it came time to prove a point, He always quoted Scripture. Should that be an important point for His followers in our day? Is there any evidence anywhere in Scripture that any of the Bible writers doubted the authority of any part of the Bible? Do we read our Bibles with the kind of reverence and respect that we should? Do we read our Bibles with the intention of getting to know God better through Jesus Christ?
21. What makes the Bible different from other books? Have you experienced the transforming effect of reading the Bible to learn more about God so you can become His friend? Do you understand the situations in biblical times well enough so that it helps you to interpret what the Bible says? Could you reach the place where as you look at the people you deal with every day you see them as Jesus would see them? What would happen if a large number of the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church lived lives like that?
22. There is so much to learn about the background for the biblical narrative. While the background material for the life of Jesus and His ministry is perhaps better known than most other parts of the Bible, there are still many aspects of life in Jesus's day that we do not understand.
23. Do you have a favorite story, parable, or saying from Jesus? Have you read everything you can find in the writings of Ellen White about that story, parable, saying, or experience?
24. How many of us have grown up with ideas, concepts, and misunderstandings that we need to unlearn before we can understand the truth?
25. Have you read the entire Sermon on the Mount recently? Have you compared it with parallel passages in Mark and Luke? Jesus was not trying to suggest that the Old Testament is no longer relevant to our lives. He was trying to demonstrate that unless the principles of the Old Testament are incorporated into our thinking so that we develop a true heart religion and become His friend, the Old Testament has not accomplished its purpose.
26. Have you tried to imagine yourself among the people who heard that sermon? How do you think they responded? Read Matthew 7:28. How would you have responded?
27. Read Matthew 15:21-28. How do you explain the apparent attitude of Jesus toward the Syrophenician woman? What was Jesus trying to teach His disciples? How do you suppose that woman came to have such faith in Jesus? And how did she know He was coming to her area? Ellen White suggested that Jesus traveled to that area specifically so He could help that woman. (*Desire of Ages* 400.1)
28. In this lesson, we have seen many aspects of Jesus's relationship to Scripture and to the people among whom He lived. By reading these stories and seeking to understand them as far as possible, what impact is the Bible supposed to have on our lives? Ultimately, the purpose of Scripture is for us to get to know God, to become like Him, and thus, to enter into eternal life. (John 17:3) Has that been the experience of your church? Of your Sabbath school class? And of yourself?

© 2013, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know how you are using them. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: December 3, 2013

Z:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Discipleship-2014\SS-1-2014-Disc-2014_01_04-Fin+.wpd