

# ***How to Interpret Scripture***

## ***The Bible as History***

Lesson #10 for June 6, 2020

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 17; Isaiah 36:1-3; 37:14-38; Daniel 1; 5; Matthew 26:57-67; Hebrews 11:1-40; Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6.

1. The Bible is filled with history. The amazing thing is that in recent times, more and more evidence has been found from outside the Bible to confirm the biblical accounts. Biblical history moves forward in a straight line from the battle between Lucifer/Satan and Michael/Christ which occurred in heaven (Revelation 12:7-12) all the way to the third coming of Jesus and the reestablishment of God's kingdom on this earth.
2. The fact that biblical history is consistent and fits with the evidence that can be confirmed from outside the Bible, makes it unique among religious documents. However, there are many things such as the existence of God that the Bible does not try to prove. Why doesn't the Bible try to prove the existence of God? The Bible simply assumes it.
3. The story of the Bible begins almost immediately with God's action in human history. Not only did He create Adam and Eve in that beautiful Garden of Eden, but also He warned Noah to build a boat before He sent the flood.
4. Next, He called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees. Later, with the help of Moses, He delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. He gave Moses copies of the Ten Commandments written with His own finger on tablets of stone. And He challenged all of us to live according to those eternal rules. Finally, He sent His Son to live and die in our world and, thus, split history in two—B.C. and A.D.
5. What evidence do we have outside of Scripture to support the biblical history? Some of the earliest direct evidence that has been found so far concerns the times of David and Solomon and their rule over Israel and Judea.
6. Until fairly recently, many critics have doubted even the existence of David, or of Solomon, or of their kingdoms. Try to imagine how different our biblical record would be if David and Solomon had not existed. There would be no Jerusalem as we know it. There would be no temple in Jerusalem. There would be no future Messiah in the line of David. Israelite history would have to be completely rewritten. (See 2 Samuel 5:6-10; 1 Kings 8:17-20; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Revelation 22:16.)

**2 Samuel 5:6-10:** <sup>6</sup> The time came when King David and his men set out to attack Jerusalem. The Jebusites, who lived there, thought that David would not be able to conquer the city, and so they said to him, "You will never get in here; even the blind and the crippled could keep you out."<sup>7</sup> (But David did capture their fortress of Zion, and it became known as "David's City".)

<sup>8</sup> That day David said to his men, "Does anybody here hate the Jebusites as much as I do? Enough to kill them? Then go up through the water tunnel and attack those poor blind cripples." (That is why it is said, "The blind and the crippled cannot enter the LORD's house.")

<sup>9</sup> After capturing the fortress, David lived in it and named it "David's City". He built the city round it, starting at the place where land was filled in on the east side of the hill. <sup>10</sup>He grew stronger all the time, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The*

*Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., 2 Samuel 5:6–10). New York: American Bible Society. [Note that the parentheses and the wording in parentheses are in the source.]<sup>†</sup>

7. One of the first mentions of David in the Bible is the story of the time he came as a simple shepherd boy to visit his brothers on the front lines of the war against the Philistines. The details of the story can be read in 1 Samuel 17. First Samuel 17:1-3 give us several details about the geographical positions and cities involved in that great rout of the Philistines by David when he killed Goliath. We now have clearly identified the town of **Shaaraim**. And what we now know about the geography fits perfectly with the biblical story. Look at this map/photo to see the places involved. [http://www.jesuswalk.com/david/02\\_david\\_goliath.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/david/02_david_goliath.htm)

**1 Samuel 17:1-3,52:** <sup>1</sup> The Philistines gathered for battle in Socoh, a town in Judah; they camped at a place called Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. <sup>2</sup>Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah, where they got ready to fight the Philistines. <sup>3</sup>The Philistines lined up on one hill and the Israelites on another, with a valley between them.... <sup>52</sup>The men of Israel and Judah shouted and ran after them, pursuing them all the way to Gath and to the gates of Ekron. The Philistines fell wounded all along the road that leads to **Shaaraim**, as far as Gath and Ekron.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

8. In 1993, excavations at the northern city of Tel Dan, right on the border with Lebanon, uncovered a large monument stone recording the victory of King Hazael of Damascus over “the King of Israel” and the king of the “House of David” around 840 B.C. This is nearly contemporary evidence for the existence of David and his monarchy. You can see a picture of that stone monument at: [http://cojs.org/tel\\_dan\\_stele- c- 840 bce/](http://cojs.org/tel_dan_stele- c- 840 bce/)
9. Read Isaiah 36:1-3 and Isaiah 37:14-38. A few years after the Assyrians from Nineveh had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (723/722 B.C.) by laying siege to Samaria, the capital of Israel, they returned to see if they could do the same to the southern kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah was king at the time in 701 B.C.; but, this time the story was different. Hezekiah was one of the few good kings. He turned to God and to the prophet Isaiah for direction. Sennacherib, one of the generals of the Assyrian army, came with a large group of soldiers to offer a peace treaty to the people of Jerusalem and overtly despise and directly challenge their God. Assyria had already conquered Lachish which was not too far away and basically controlled all of the territory of Judah except Jerusalem. They had conquered 46 of Hezekiah’s strong walled towns.
10. But, instead of defying Sennacherib or trying to fight him, Hezekiah, with the help of Isaiah, turned to the Lord; God’s angel wiped out Sennacherib’s entire army. (Isaiah 37:36) Sennacherib later boasted that he shut up Hezekiah in his city “like a bird in a cage.” But, just as God had prophesied in Isaiah 37:33-35, the Assyrians did not enter that city or conquer it. In the British Museum in London there is a large room displaying the wall carvings from the Assyrian capital in Nineveh describing Sennacherib’s conquest of Lachish in Judah. But, he did not conquer Jerusalem.

**Isaiah 37:33-36:** <sup>33</sup> “This is what the LORD has said about the Assyrian emperor: ‘He will not enter this city or shoot a single arrow against it. No soldiers with shields will come near the city, and no siege mounds will be built round it. <sup>34</sup>He will go back by the road on which he came, without entering this city. I, the LORD, have spoken. <sup>35</sup>I will defend this city and protect it, for the sake of my own honour and because of the promise I made to my servant David.’” <sup>36</sup> An

**angel of the LORD went to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 soldiers.** At dawn the next day there they lay, all dead!—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

11. Clearly, this was a miraculous occurrence. Critics have tried to suggest that maybe there was some kind of plague that affected the army; but, for the Assyrian soldiers all to be dead in one night would be impossible to explain by natural events.
12. Might God perform miraculous deliverances of His people in the last days? Has God performed miracles to preserve some of His children, even in our day? For example, see: *One Miracle after Another* by Pavel Goia.
13. There are many, many small clay tablets that have been recovered from Babylon. And many of them are from the time of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.
14. Read Jeremiah 39:3. Notice especially the name *Sarsechim*. A scholar from the University of Vienna who was able to read the cuneiform text found a tablet stored in the British Museum with the very same name on it.

**Jeremiah 39:3:** (When Jerusalem was captured, all the high officials of the king of Babylonia came and took their places at the Middle Gate, including Nergal Sarezar, Samgar Nebo, **Sarsechim**, and another Nergal Sarezar.)—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [Footnote: The names and titles of these men are unclear.]

**Jeremiah 39:3:** Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came in and sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, **Sar-sekim** the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon.—*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*.<sup>\*</sup> (1995). (Jeremiah 39:3). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.<sup>†</sup>

15. There are well over 100 different individuals from the Old and New Testaments whose existence has now been documented from extra-biblical sources. This is a phenomenal amount of evidence in support of the biblical history.
16. We know about the story of Daniel and his many experiences, vindicating the power and activities of the Lord God of heaven.
17. After arriving in Babylon and taking charge of the people there, Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar conquered the then-known world. Nebuchadnezzar followed in his footsteps. They built a fantastic city with beautiful walls and towers, more than 300 temples, and an exquisite palace. Look at the description of the beast representing Babylon in Daniel 7.

**Daniel 7:4:** The first one looked like a lion, but had wings like an eagle. While I was watching, the wings were torn off. The beast was lifted up and made to stand upright. And then a human mind was given to it.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

18. It is interesting that Babylon is represented in the Bible as a lion with wings. Many beautiful depictions on tile of lions in various positions have been preserved from Babylon. Many of these tile lions have been preserved and can be seen in the various museums in the Middle East and in Europe. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar\\_Gate#/media/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar_Gate#/media/)
19. How do you think the early training of Daniel and his three friends affected the biblical record and the history of the world? What if Daniel had not been faithful? Would his visions have been given to someone else?

**Daniel 1:8:** But Daniel **purposed in his heart** that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he

requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.—*The Holy Bible: King James Version*.<sup>\*</sup> (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Daniel 1:8). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.<sup>†</sup>

20. What does **purposed in his heart** mean? The heart, of course, is only a very specialized muscle for pumping blood to support the rest of the body. But, in this passage Daniel was telling us that he was absolutely determined to obey God's will no matter what the results might be; his mind was made up.
21. Some critics have suggested that maybe even Jesus Christ did not exist. But, more and more evidence is being found to support that history, the story which we know from the Gospels.
22. Read Matthew 26:57-67; John 11:45-53; and John 18:29-31. Caiaphas was the high priest during the final days of the life of Jesus. He was determined to rid the world of Jesus whom he considered to be a rival.

**Matthew 26:57:** Those who had arrested Jesus took him to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the teachers of the Law and the elders had gathered together.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

23. Josephus, a Jew who served as a historian for the Romans, wrote:

“Besides which he also deprived Joseph, who was also called Caiphas [*sic*], of the high priesthood, and appointed Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him.”—*Josephus Complete Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1969), book 18, chapter 4, p. 381.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> for Wednesday, June 3]. [Note that “[*sic*]” is in the source.]<sup>†§</sup>

24. In 1990, a family tomb was discovered south of Jerusalem containing 12 ossuaries. An ossuary is a bone box. People were buried without being preserved in any way, and fairly quickly the flesh was gone. The Jews then would gather the bones and carefully place them in a smaller *bone box* where they would be protected. These ossuaries (bone boxes) were clearly dated from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. And on one of those very elaborate bone boxes it says: “Joseph, son of Caiaphas.” Many scholars believe that this was the actual bone box holding the very bones of the man who condemned Jesus. See it at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caiaphas\\_ossuary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caiaphas_ossuary)
25. Furthermore, in 1961, an inscription was found in the city of Caesarea Maritima with most of the name of Pontius Pilate carved on it. (Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 23:3-5; John 18:33-38) See the inscription on “the so-called Pilate Stone” pictured on the right margin about half way down the article at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius\\_Pilate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate)
26. Numerous secular historians from the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries mentioned Christians and mentioned that they were followers of the Christ. Even their gatherings are documented in some detail.
27. How do you feel about these kinds of evidence as a support to our belief in the Bible?
28. While these items provide some confirmation, we must not base our trust on archaeological evidence alone. Critics will try to take many of these writings and much of this information and try to reinterpret it in a way that does not agree with the Bible.
29. But, Jews and Christians can rejoice as more and more evidence is found supporting the

historicity of the Bible.

30. Read Hebrews 11. Think of what this says about the faithful followers of God. Enoch walked with God. Noah built a boat on faith alone and rode out the worst storm this world has ever seen. Abraham exercised his faith in God and traveled to a new country, became a father at an old age, and, finally, was offering that promised son on an altar when, suddenly, his hand was held back and a substitute was found. Sarah became pregnant at a time when it was thought to be impossible. Joseph prophesied that Israel would leave Egypt and asked to have his bones taken back to Canaan when they went. Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and led Israel out of Egypt, not afraid of Pharaoh, choosing rather to suffer with the children of Israel. Moses, raised as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, although not entering the land of Canaan on this earth was taken from his grave to the heavenly Canaan. Rahab avoided being killed in the destruction of Jericho because she gave the spies a friendly welcome. Despite all his foibles, Samson managed to bring down the Philistine temple, killing thousands but dying with them, thus, defeating the armies of his enemies.
31. Faith may seem like something quite nebulous to some people. But, for these people it was very real. Hezekiah had God's promise! Daniel had God's vision.
32. How much do you think God told Noah about what was coming? How would you describe rain to someone who had never seen it? How did Noah try to describe it to the people of his day?
33. We each face decisions every day in our lives. How much importance does prayer and Bible study play on your day-by-day decisions?

**The Bible is the most ancient and the most comprehensive history that men possess.** It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and throughout the ages a divine hand has preserved its purity. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research in vain seeks to penetrate. In God's word only do we behold the power that laid the foundations of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only do we find an authentic account of the origin of nations. Here only is given a history of our race unsullied by human pride or prejudice.—Ellen G. White, *Education*\* 173.1.†

He who has a knowledge of God and His word has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He does not test the Bible by man's ideas of science. He brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that God's word is truth, and truth can never contradict itself; whatever in the teaching of so-called science contradicts the truth of God's revelation is mere human guesswork.

To the really wise, scientific research opens vast fields of thought and information.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 8, 325.1-2.

34. For many, many years, biblical critics laughed at Bible-believing Christians and Jews because there was no extra-biblical evidence for Belshazzar. Then, a small cylinder was found in the British Museum with the name of Belshazzar and his father, Nabonidus, on it. Once again, the biblical record has been vindicated. See a picture of that cylinder and an English translation at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cylinders\\_of\\_Nabonidus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cylinders_of_Nabonidus)

"As for me, Nabonidus, king of Babylon, save me from sinning against your great godhead and grant me as a present a life long of days, and as for Belshazzar, the eldest son—my offspring—instill reverence for your great godhead in his heart and may he not commit any cultic mistake, may he be satiated with a life of plenitude."



35. To a Christian, history is important, mostly because it is His story. History includes all of human existence. Someday, God will show us all those details in living, 3D color in that panorama of the great controversy. (See *Great Controversy* 666.1-668.4.) So, God has laid out key parts of the history of mankind in the biblical record.
36. How do you feel about that record? Would you agree that biblical faith is based on facts and history? We believe in a God who acts in history. How many different ways can you think of in which God interacted with the human race down through the generations?
37. He guided the patriarchs, sometimes in their day-to-day activities. Think of His relationship with Abraham, and even further back to Noah. He walked with Adam and Eve in the quiet of the evening. But, in later times, He sent prophets and gave visions and directed kings and others. Think of the directions He gave David. In light of all this, how should we be living today when our faith is challenged by so-called modern and postmodern thinking? The evidence we presented in this lesson gives us something serious to think about.
38. What is the most convincing evidence in your mind to substantiate the truthfulness of the biblical account? We could go on and on. Clay seals have been found from Hezekiah and Isaiah, as well as Eliakim. (2 Kings 18:18) A potsherd fragment was found in 1996 by Ehud Netzer at Masada and on it it reads **regi Herodi Iudaico**, “for Herod, King of Judea.” It is the first known record in which Herod the Great is mentioned outside of the Bible. Of course, there are coins with his name also.
39. There are literally thousands of mounds in the Middle East that probably all represent former towns, villages, or cities. Only a few of those have been excavated. Some very important sites include Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Even these are still yielding further evidence, especially the area just south of the temple mount known as the Ophel excavation site. (See <https://watchjerusalem.co.il/37-analysis-the-hezekiah-bulla> and See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOK31CTxQqI>).
40. The Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath have been excavated quite extensively. Some of the Philistine kings have been mentioned in inscriptions uncovered at Ekron. The evidence suggests that the Philistines had a very technologically advanced society in the land of Canaan.
41. But, there are yet hundreds of sites that could be excavated. Who knows what will be uncovered? How much evidence do we need? How can we be sure that even though many people and places named in the Bible have been documented in archeology that the Bible is not just a “historical novel”?
42. Do you know of any actual miracles that have happened to you? Or, to a family member? Or, friend? How does God work in our day? How should we relate to those who feel that the Bible is a book full of erroneous material and even myths or that the Bible is a “historical novel”? How should young Adventists feel when they attend secular universities where they are told repeatedly in various ways that Bible cannot be relied upon?
43. What can we do in our day to help people understand more and more the archaeological basis for believing in Scripture?

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