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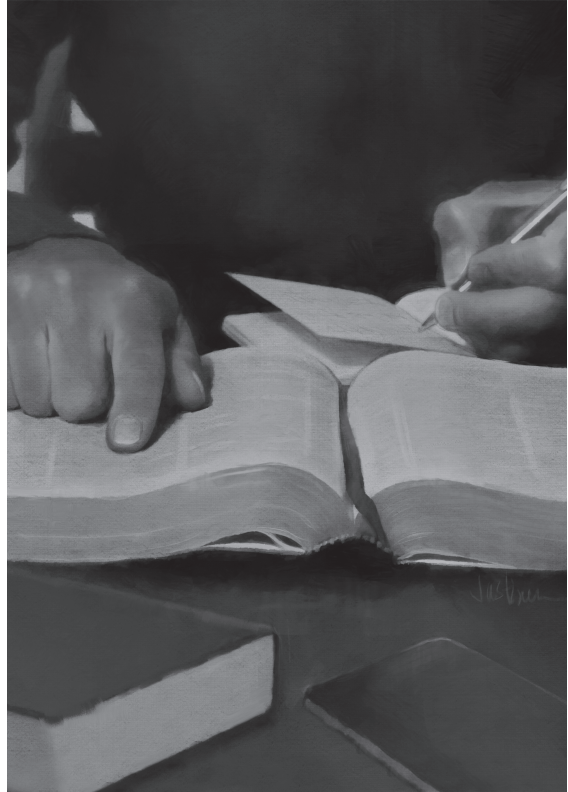
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How to Interpret Scripture



As Seventh-day Adventists, we are Protestants, which means that we believe in *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone as the sole authoritative foundation of our faith and doctrines. This is especially relevant in the last days, when, as Ellen G. White said, God will have “a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

Of course, we are not unique among Protestants in claiming “the Bible and the Bible alone” as the foundation of our faith, even though many who make that claim believe in such things as Sunday as the New Testament replacement for the seventh-day Sabbath; the immortality of the soul; eternal torment in hell for the lost; and even a secret rapture in which Jesus quietly and surreptitiously returns to the earth and snatches away the saved while everyone else is left wondering how those people could have disappeared.

In other words, just having the Bible, and claiming to believe it, is one thing, as important as that is. But, as the proliferation of false doctrines (all supposedly derived from Scripture) reveals, we need to know how to interpret the Bible correctly, as well.

Hence, the subject of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for this quarter, “How to Interpret Scripture.” In it, we begin with the assumption that Scripture, as the Word of God, is “the infallible revelation of His will” and “the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trust-

worthy record of God’s acts in history.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 2nd ed. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 11. In short, Scripture is the foundational source of the truths that we believe and proclaim to the world. Or, as the Bible itself says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “All Scripture,” of course, means *all* Scripture—even the Scripture that we might not like; that might step on our toes; and that, to use contemporary parlance, might not be “politically correct.”

In short, Scripture is the foundational source of the truths that we believe and proclaim to the world.

From this starting point, then, we will examine how the Bible teaches us to interpret itself. That is, rather than first going to such extra-biblical sources as science, philosophy, and history (which, if used correctly, can be a blessing), we will seek to uncover from within the biblical texts the tools that reveal the great truths found in its sacred pages. We are told that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21, NKJV). And we believe that among the things these “holy men of God spoke” are keys to helping us interpret the Word of God.

For instance, how did Paul or the Gospel writers interpret the Old Testament? If what they wrote was inspired by God, then certainly how they read and interpreted the Scriptures could be central to helping us learn to do the same, as well. And how did Jesus Himself use and interpret Scripture? We won’t find a better example on how to read the Bible than from Jesus.

At the same time, we will explore our own presuppositions and reasoning about context, language, culture, and history and how they impact the way we read and understand the Word of God. How are we to interpret the parables, prophecies, sacred history, admonitions, songs of praise, prophetic visions, and dreams—the whole spectrum of inspired writing found in the Scriptures?

All these questions and more will be explored this quarter because, as doctrines such as eternal torment in hell or Sunday sacredness show, believing in the Bible itself isn’t enough. We must learn how to interpret it, as well.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility—a privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is designed to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. The Overview** segment introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the teachers edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary segment also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. To facilitate participation, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.