

METHODS AND APPLICATIONS

# HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE AND THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

A CORE SKILLS  
SABBATH SCHOOL  
TRAINING COURSE  
CU-103

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A Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher Training Course

This Enrichment Training Course was prepared for the Adult Ministries Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America

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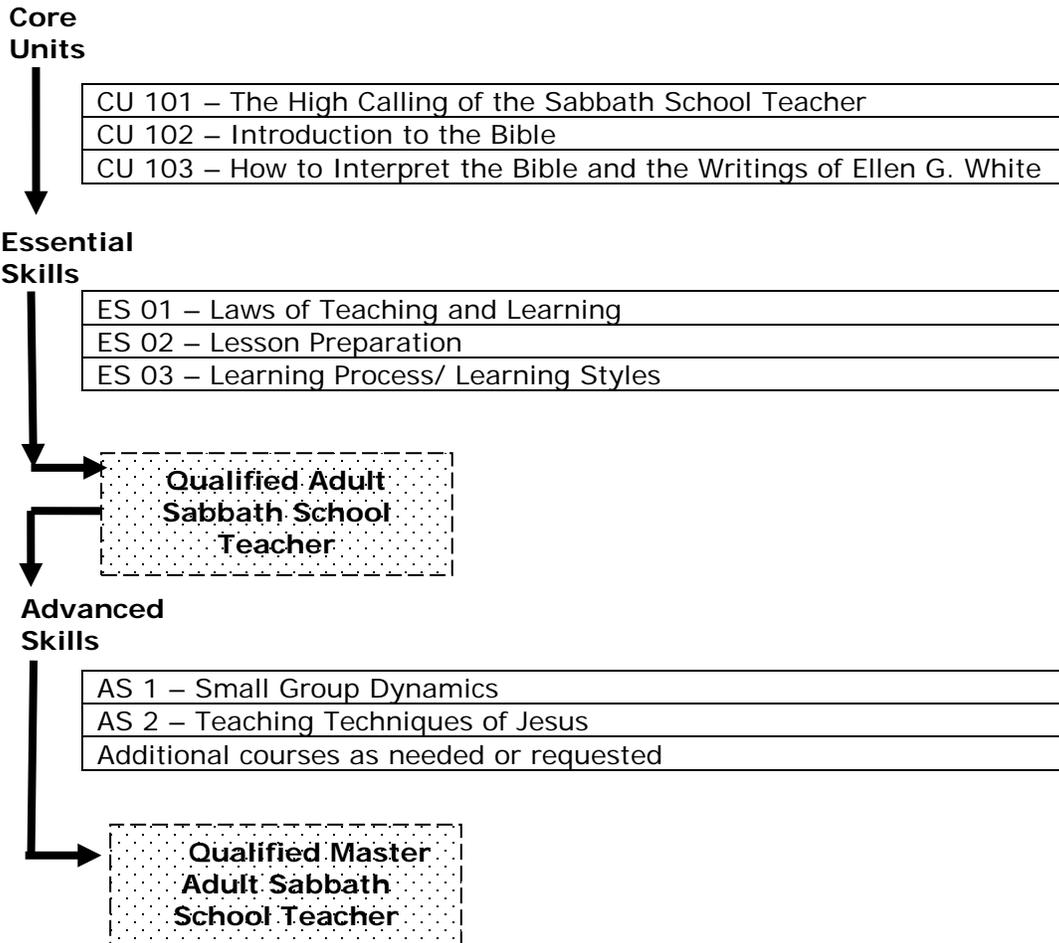
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**A North American Division Adult Ministries Sponsored  
Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher Training Course**

The Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division sponsors a curriculum for the enrichment of Adult Sabbath School teacher/discussion leaders. This curriculum has three levels of teacher enrichment. All the courses are available online at [www.nadadultministries.org](http://www.nadadultministries.org).

These courses are all self-contained units and do not have to be studied in sequence. If you wish to obtain either the "Qualified Adult Sabbath School Teacher" or "Qualified Master Adult Sabbath School Teacher" *Certificates of Accomplishment* you must complete all the previous courses in the curriculum outline.

**North American Division Sabbath School Teacher's  
Qualification Process and Curriculum**



# **How to Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G White**

**A North American Division Adult Ministries Sponsored  
Core Level Adult Sabbath School Teacher Training Course**

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Course Summary

## **Course Description**

It is indispensable for a Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader to know how to correctly interpret the Bible. In the case of Seventh-day Adventists the same responsibility applies to correctly understanding and using the writings of Ellen G White. This science of biblical interpretation is called "hermeneutics."

This course on hermeneutics is probably the most technical course in this curriculum, and will require careful study. The result of your study will be a well-informed and practical knowledge of the basic rules of biblical interpretation.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has a carefully formulated document titled "Methods of Bible Study" that was officially adopted by the church in 1986. You can access this document at [www.adventist.org/methodsofbiblestudy](http://www.adventist.org/methodsofbiblestudy). This course adheres to those guidelines.

## **How to Study This Course**

This is one of the online courses sponsored by the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division. When you finish, you will receive a Certificate of Completion indicating that you have satisfactorily finished this course via [www.nadadventist.org](http://www.nadadventist.org).

This course is both theoretical and practical. It is composed of a course outline, assigned readings, and assignment fill-in sheets.

You can download the material if you prefer to study from a printed copy. You can also study directly on the screen if that is your preference.

## Vocabulary

**Teacher/discussion leader.** In North American Division churches, it is customary to use two terms for the position traditionally known as a Sabbath School teacher: (1) "Teacher" and, (2) "Discussion Leader." The reason for the dual terms is that the title of "teacher" is too often taken to be a synonym for "lecturer." A Sabbath School teacher is supposed to be a facilitator who motivates class members to participate in the study and discussion of the lesson. Thus, the use of the two titles as a motivating factor to help both teacher and class members understand the ideal role of this Sabbath School leadership team member. Both titles often appear in this course as "teacher/discussion leader."

Teacher enhancement training materials and reading assignments almost always use the term "teacher," so please remember that in terms of how the position is supposed to function, "teacher" and "discussion leader" mean the same thing.

**Church/district.** Many churches in the North American Division belong to an extended family known as a district. This is usually because the local conference can only finance one pastor for various churches. Since this type of arrangement is common, and often the churches in a district cooperate in sponsoring training programs, etc. the term "church/district" is used in this course.

## Textbook

Your textbook is the Bible itself. Use a version you are comfortable with. Nevertheless, it is best to use a translation like the *English Standard Version*, *New King James Version* or the *New International Version* for this course. A paraphrase like the *Living Bible* or *The Clear Word* is not the best to use for a course of this type. The *Andrews Study Bible*, based on the *New King James Version* has helpful notes. Accessing a website containing various Bible versions such as Bible Gateway ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)) is also beneficial.

Two books will be helpful in studying the material in the course: (1) Lee J. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study: A Guide to Understanding, Teaching, and Preaching the Word of God*. (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995). This book goes deeply into the subjects studied in the course and is a valuable addition to the library of a Sabbath School teacher, and (2) George W. Reid (editor) *Understanding Scripture* (Biblical Research Institute, 2006).

## Student Fulfillment Card

At the end of this Study Guide you will find a Student Fulfillment Card. This is the record you will submit to the Adult Ministries Department of the North American Division via the website [www.nadadultministries.org](http://www.nadadultministries.org) this is how you will receive your Certificate of Accomplishment.

## Types of Study Locations

- If you are studying this class on your own, this online Study Guide will indicate the readings and exercises that you should complete. There are some attached readings and assignment sheets you can print out and fill in. They identify the important points of the readings and units of study. It is very important to read these materials and fill in the assignment sheets. They are your way of knowing how you are doing in the course.

- If you are studying in a classroom-type setting, an instructor will lead you through various participatory activities.

- If you are studying in a small group, ideas may be included for those studying in this environment.

- There are no examinations scheduled for this class, unless an individual instructor decides to use them.

## Course Introduction

The mission of the adult Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader is founded on three cornerstones: being, knowing, and doing.

- “Being” means that an adult Sabbath School teacher must have a valid and perceptible Christian experience, and be prepared to serve as a spiritual guide for her or his class.
- “Knowing” means that a Sabbath School teacher must know what the Bible says and have a significant understanding of biblical history, doctrines, and teachings, and know how to study and interpret the Scriptures.
- “Doing” means that a Sabbath School teacher must have a knowledge of teaching methodology and be willing to invest the time and energy necessary to adequately prepare and lead a Sabbath School class.

This course, *How to Study the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G. White*, is primarily a “knowing” class. It outlines some key principles of Biblical interpretation and focuses on some interpretation issues that are particularly relevant for Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School teachers and class members. It also reviews the principles for studying and interpreting the writings of Ellen G. White.

### What is Hermeneutics?

The process of biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics. This word comes from the Greek word *hermeneuō*, which means to “translate” or “interpret.” Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible.

The Bible is very precise when it states, “We have the prophetic word confirmed, . . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1: 19-21, NKJV).

A Sabbath School teacher/discussion leader must know the correct principles of biblical interpretation. If these are not followed, all kinds of strange things surface in Sabbath School classes.

The same is true about the use of Bible translations. Translators follow certain principles, depending on their philosophy of translation. Unit 2 outlines these principles and gives some guidelines about the use of various translations and Bible versions.

Some views about how to interpret the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White are frequently taken for granted by Seventh-day Adventists, often without any conscious examination. Some of these common perceptions are accurate and some are not. Both the Sabbath School teacher and the class members need to make sure that the principles they are using are valid and accurate.

### The Hermeneutics of Ellen G White’s Writings

Part 2 studies principles for interpreting the writings of Ellen G. White. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White was a recipient of the gift of prophecy, and as a result, the same principles of interpretation that apply to the Scriptures apply also to her writings.

Some of the same views about Bible interpretation are taken for granted in interpreting the writings of Ellen White, and, when erroneous, cause the same misinterpretations as when applied to the Bible. As in the study of the interpretation of the Bible itself, these views need to be clarified to make sure that they are valid and accurate.

### Helpful Resources

The books listed as resources in the bibliography are helpful for further study. One word of caution, however. Many books on this subject often advocate one or both of two viewpoints that are not accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. The first, called “verbal plenary” inspiration will be examined in this course. The second is a view of prophetic interpretation known as “dispensationalism,” often called the “secret rapture” or “futurism.”

Acceptance of these views does not negate the value of most of the information in these books about hermeneutics, but you must read with your eyes open, especially in sections dealing with the interpretation of prophecy.

### **Why Is This Course Important?**

- It is important to understand the basic principles of biblical interpretation because that is what Sabbath School class is all about.
- It is vital to use these principles so that class members will learn and understand what the valid biblical principles are and how they apply to their personal lives.
- It is important to know the correct principles of interpreting Bible prophecy. The system of prophetic interpretation known as "historicism" that the Seventh-day Adventist church follows is based on chronological events that should be accurately portrayed in Sabbath School classes.
- It is important because all kinds of ideas pop up in Sabbath School classes prefaced by phrases like "the Bible says," or "Mrs. White says," when neither the Bible nor Ellen White ever said whatever the quote is. Sabbath School class is the ideal place to resolve some of these notions using accurate biblical rules of interpretation.

### **Course Objectives**

- The teacher will examine and acquire a knowledge and understanding of the basic rules of biblical interpretation.
- The teacher or prospective teacher be able to apply these rules to the process of teaching in Sabbath School.
- The teacher will examine and become familiar the correct ways of interpreting the writings of Ellen G White.

# UNIT 1

## The Place, Purpose, and Authority of the Bible

The purpose of this Unit is to explore and recognize the place the Bible occupies in the life of the individual Christian and the church. It focuses on the understanding and use of Scripture in Sabbath School by the teacher/discussion leader and the class members.

The material in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* is based on what is called a “high view” of Scripture. This means that it presents the Bible as true in what it says and as an authoritative source of doctrine and spiritual counsel. Most Sabbath School teachers and class members also accept the Bible as an authoritative source of information and counsel.

*Fundamental Belief No. 1* clearly declares our belief about the Bible: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is the principle tool in the hands of Christians to do the work of the Kingdom. Many practicing Christians, however, including many Sabbath School members, though they may have what is often called “a working knowledge” of the Bible, do not really understand the nature of the Bible, its authority, or its role in the life of the individual Christian and the corporate church body. It is one of the responsibilities of the Sabbath School teacher to demonstrate and illustrate proper Bible study methodology and interpretation.

### What This Unit Is About

The Bible claims to be a unique, supernatural book. In the eyes of Christians, this claim makes it different from all other books. Many people, however, do not understand how the process of transmitting divine information works. This Unit will study the claims of the Bible itself and look at the issues of how it came to be inspired.

This Unit will present four topics: (1) the place of the Bible in Christianity, (2) the purpose of the Bible, (3) the authority of the Bible, and (4) the meaning of “revelation,” “inspiration,” and “illumination.”

At the end of the Unit, you will find a Bible study about the Bible. It is organized in such a way that you can use it as it is printed, or you can mark it in your Bible for quick reference.

When you complete this Unit, you should be able to: (1) articulate either verbally or in writing the place the Bible occupies in Christianity, (2) articulate either verbally or in writing the purpose of the Bible, (3) understand and explain the authority of the Bible, (4) explain the meaning of the phrase “the only rule of faith and practice,” (5) explain the relationship between the authority of the Bible and the authority of personal experience, and (6) articulate either verbally or in writing the differences among “revelation,” “inspiration,” and “illumination.”

### The Nature of Christianity

Christianity is a revealed religion. It did not originate because someone set out to start a new religion. It did not begin because someone was dissatisfied with the church to which he or she belonged. Rather, God revealed Himself to humanity in the book we call the Bible. The authors of the Bible acted as God’s agents and recorded for all people and all time what the apostle Paul calls “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2 NKJV). The Bible reveals God’s

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<sup>1</sup><<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>>.

benevolent acts throughout human history, His character, and His greatest revelation, the person of Jesus. By thus revealing Himself in a person and in written form, God made it possible for us to know Him in a personal way.

### **The Different Kinds of Revelation**

**1. General revelation** is a non-specific type of revelation. God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes. 3:11, NIV), but sin dulled our understanding so that, unassisted, we “cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (verse 11, NIV).

For instance, Paul says that the heathen are without excuse for worshipping idols because nature itself gives testimony to the existence of a creator (Rom. 1:20). Nevertheless, looking at a tree and acknowledging that someone designed it is different from a person-to-person contact.

Another type of general revelation is the voice of conscience. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21, NKJV). Nevertheless, the voice of conscience is reliable only when the person to whom the conscience belongs is tuned in to heaven’s transmitter.

General revelation is valuable, but it is impersonal and non-specific.

**2. Special Revelation.** Special revelation means that in a specific, objective way God has made Himself known. The main sources of special revelation are Jesus and the Bible. Jesus is no longer with us in person, so the Bible, the written record of God’s dealings with humanity, is our main source of special revelation. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” (Ps. 119:11, NKJV).

“As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can. No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind thus brought in contact with the thoughts of the Infinite cannot but expand and strengthen. . . . In its wide range of style and subjects the Bible has something to interest every mind and appeal to every heart. In its pages are found history the most ancient; biography the truest to life; principles of government for the control of the state, for the regulation of the household--principles that human wisdom has never equaled. It contains philosophy the most profound, poetry the sweetest and the most sublime, the most impassioned and the most pathetic. Immeasurably superior in value to the productions of any human author are the Bible writings.”— Ellen G White, *Education*, pp. 124, 125.

### **The Purpose of the Scriptures**

The key text for this topic is 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (NIV). The Greek word here translated “God-breathed” is also translated as “inspired by God” (NASB, NRSV, NLT). Although the Bible does not spell out all the details of the mechanics of how God inspired the writers, it makes clear that the source is God Himself.

This text points out the basic purposes of the Bible:

- **Teaching.** The Scriptures are the primary source from which we get our information about God, the plan of salvation, and our doctrinal beliefs.
- **Rebuking.** The Bible is the source of spiritual “rebuke.” Whatever categories of “rebuke” the church uses must come from the Bible. They cannot be artificially invented and then applied to people.
- **Correcting and training in righteousness.** Whatever we know about “righteousness” comes from the Bible. It is designed to keep us spiritually on track. Ellen G White writes:

"The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 20.

"God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. vi, vii.

## Assignment 1

# Revelation and Christianity

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This assignment is an evaluation of your progress. Everyone's answers will be somewhat different. *[Don't look at the suggested answers at the bottom of the page until you have finished the assignment].*

1. Read Hebrews 1: 1,2. What do these verses say about the place of the Bible in Christianity and the role of Jesus as a revelation from God?.
  
2. Read Acts 17:16-34. Is Paul appealing to general or special revelation? Explain your answer.
  
3. If you were the author of Fundamental Belief No. 1, would you have written it differently? If your answer is yes, rewrite it and explain why you feel your version is better.

**Answers:** (1) They teach that in the Old Testament God spoke through prophets and in the New Testament even more personally through His Son. This places the Bible at the very center of Christianity. It is the source book for Christianity. (2) Both, but mostly general revelation because the Athenians had no authoritative scriptures like the Bible. Paul contrasts idol worship with the worship of God and appeals to personal experience, "He is not far from every one of us." (3) Answers will vary.

## The Authority of Scripture

“Authority” means different things to different people. (1) To some, a person in authority must be obeyed to the letter of the law. (2) To others, authority means anyone above them on a ladder of hierarchy. (3) To yet others authority means that whoever is speaking knows what he or she is talking about, and is therefore an authority on a certain subject.

In the case of the Bible, all these perceptions are true; but there is more to it. In the Bible, God is not just making suggestions; He is telling us what to believe and how to behave—and all in our best interest.

**Imperial authority.** God can do this because He has what is called *imperial authority*. Since He is the author of truth, whatever He says about truth is unquestionable. The Scripture, Jesus said, “. . . cannot be broken” (John 10:35 NKJV). The NIV says that it “cannot be set aside” and the *Amplified Version* adds: “cannot be undone *or* annulled *or* broken.”

What the Bible contains can always be studied deeper, and understood better. The student often must learn to interpret some things through the eyes of the people who originally read the messages. Sometimes Bible writers even misquote something, or refer from memory to the wrong book, but the messages they deliver are still unquestionably correct. Therefore, whatever is revealed in the Bible is authoritative.

## The Bible Writers and Biblical Authority

- Paul: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37, NKJV).
- Jeremiah: “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: . . . ‘you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak’” (Jer. 1:4, 7, NKJV).
- David: “The word of the Lord is right” (Ps. 33:4, NKJV) “The word of the Lord is proven” (18:30, NKJV).
- Peter: “The word of the Lord stands forever” (1 Pet. 1:25, NIV).
- Jesus: “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, NKJV).

The Bible uses the phrase, “The Word of the Lord” quite frequently. It is a broad phrase used in different ways.

• Sometimes it means a direct revelation from God. This is its most common use in the Old Testament (Gen. 15:4; 1 Sam. 3:7; 1 Sam. 3:1; 2 Kings 24:2).

• Sometimes it refers to the instructions the Lord has given. This is the most common use in the New Testament, although it is used this way in both Testaments (1 Sam. 15:23; 2 Chron. 34:21; Acts 8:25).

• Sometimes it refers to the sum total of God’s will for the human race (Amos 8:12). Ellen G White refers to the “Word of God” in this text as “the shelter of God’s mercy.” — *The Great Controversy*, p. 629.

• Sometimes it refers to the creative power of God (Ps. 33:6).

• Sometimes it refers to Jesus himself (John 1:1-3, 14). “He was the Word of God—God’s thought made audible.”— *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

All these uses of the phrase “Word of the Lord” fit into the categories listed in 2 Timothy 3:16 and demonstrate the purpose of the Bible in action. Our primary source of the “Word of the Lord” today is the Bible, because that is what we can physically hold in our hands, read, and study.

## The Only Rule of Faith and Practice

This phrase is often misunderstood. Some understand it to mean that even though, in their opinion, the Bible contains errors and is not historically or scientifically accurate, it is still an accurate guide for spiritual experience, and valuable as a teacher. It is not, they declare, "truth" itself, but may "contain" truth if one discovers in it something that applies to her or his life. This is called the "neo-orthodox" view of Scripture.

Others understand this phrase to mean that the Bible is the final authority to which the Christian appeals for faith, the understanding of religious truth, and practice, the way a Christian should live and behave.

## Some Other Important Definitions

Sabbath School teachers and class members need a clear understanding of what the word "infallible" means as it applies to Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. The word itself means "not capable of being mistaken." It appears only once in the King James Version in English: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many *infallible* proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The original Greek simply says "proofs." Someone added the word "infallible" to this text in the KJV. Other translations read "convincing proofs."

*Verbal inspiration* is the idea that in the original manuscripts (called "autographs"), God gave every word of the Bible. That's what many people understand as infallible. (This idea will be addressed in more detail later in this Unit). Many Sabbath School members unconsciously accept this view, or take it for granted, even though it has never been the accepted view of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

A problem with this view is its inability to account adequately for what Ellen G. White terms the "mysteries" of the Bible. We must be careful not to superimpose an artificial theory of infallibility that the Bible does not claim for itself.

There are things in the Bible we do not understand. There are so-called scientific statements in the Bible that cannot be taken literally. For instance, in the book of Revelation angels stand on "the four corners of the earth" (Rev. 7:1, NKJV). The earth, of course, doesn't have four corners. So, this text cannot be literal. It must have a symbolic meaning. It is a figure of speech that we still use today: "He traveled to the far corners of the earth."

Ellen G. White comments:

"Some look to us gravely and say, 'Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?' This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth."— *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 16.

For instance, some have struggled with the fact that three gospels, Matthew, Luke, and John say that at the time of Peter's denial of Jesus, a rooster crowed. Mark, however, says the rooster crowed *twice*. That doesn't seem like much of a problem—unless you have to justify the use of every word as literally the words of God. Then you must analyze why God would tell one writer that the rooster would crow twice, and the others only that it would crow, without relating how many times it would crow.

One author solves this problem by saying that in a court of law, not all the witnesses always get every detail right. Mark simply remembered more than the other writers.<sup>2</sup> This is a logical conclusion, except that most people believe that Mark got his information from Peter, and Matthew also used Mark for his outline.<sup>3</sup> So if you believe that God revealed every word, to Mark, you also have to explain why Matthew left out the word "twice".

A solution is simply to understand that "rooster-crow" was one of the four "watches" of the Roman way of counting time during the night, and Peter, who probably gave Mark his information, was very conscious of that detail. The other writers, focusing more on the meaning and outcomes of the incident, did not pick up that detail.<sup>4</sup>

### **How Seventh-day Adventists Understand Biblical Infallibility**

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible is an infallible revelation of God's will. The Bible is the very Word of God and is trustworthy historically and factually, but not to the extent that the human element in the writing and transmission of the Biblical text is almost eliminated. Except in a few cases, the Bible writers were not secretaries recording God's very words. They were messengers transmitting a message the best way they could in the appropriate language.

As *Fundamental Belief* No. 1 states "They [the Scriptures] are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."

### **The Bible and Personal Experience**

Though a Bible is a physical book you can hold in your hands, it is not a systematically organized textbook. It contains all kinds of word images, parables, figures of speech, stories, experiences, and admonitions. These things require interpretation. The Bible writers used expressions contemporary to their times, talked about contemporary events, and often used parables and stories relevant to their hearers, but often strange to our ears.

Some feel that because this is so, personal experience is the real guide in the Christian life. They often feel that their own experience is superior to the objective facts of Scripture. The words "I feel" or "I think" often express the underlying authority in their lives. The following Bible texts clearly show that the Lord requires more than personal opinion:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV).

"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:46-49, NKJV).

What these texts tell us is that the express Word of God must govern personal experience. *There are certain non-negotiable truths in Scripture that are objective requirements of the Lord and not subject to anyone's opinions, feelings, likes or dislikes.* That is not to say that a person's opinion or rational processes are not valid resources for the study of the

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<sup>2</sup>Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 339, 340.

<sup>3</sup>See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 50, 524.

Bible. What it means is that the final authority for decision-making in the Christian life must be the Scriptures, not a person's own opinion.

On the other hand, the uniqueness of the Christian religion is that God did not leave humanity with only a book through which they could understand His will. He also provided His Son as an incarnate human being so that Christianity became a very personal relationship to a fellow human being.

"We must distinguish between the objective revelation of the Scriptures and the personal response of the individual to that revelation. Both are necessary if the divine power of God is to be communicated to man. Nothing is clearer in the Bible than that there stands over against man the objective revelation of God in the spoken and written Word that comes with a 'Thus saith the Lord.'"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Edward Heppenstall, *The Ministry*, Aug, 1966, pp. 5, 6.



## Revelation, Inspiration, and Illumination

There are three key concepts about how the message of the Bible originated, is transmitted, and is transferred into practical everyday living: revelation, inspiration, and illumination. Each concept plays a role in the overall drama. Failure to discriminate among them, or misunderstanding the role and function of each, will confuse the issue and cause difficulties in the interpretation and use of the Bible.

### Revelation

Revelation is an action of God. The word is often used to describe special times when people hear or see God intervene into human history.

For instance, Jeremiah heard an audible voice calling him to a prophetic ministry (Jeremiah 1: 1-4). Samuel heard an audible voice calling him to the same kind of ministry (1 Samuel 3: 1-10). On Mount Sinai, the Lord literally wrote with His own finger on two tables of stone (Deuteronomy 5: 22; Exodus 31: 18). Balaam's discussion with his donkey ended abruptly when he literally saw the angel who was causing the situation in the first place (Numbers 22: 21-31). The Lord once told Moses to write down an experience so the people would remember it, because the time would come when the enemy tribe referred to would cease to exist, and only that written record would remain as a testimony to the power of God (Exodus 17: 14).

Biblical revelation may also consist of a second layer of exposure to the voice or action of God. For instance, after he received the two tables written by God Himself, Moses sat down and wrote out the rest of what he had learned on the mountain in a volume that became known as the "Book of the Law" (Exodus 24: 4; Deuteronomy 31: 24-26). It was a revelation by God, the content was correct and authoritative, but the wording and organization came from Moses.

In another instance, Luke says that he "carefully investigated" everything about the life of Jesus and proposed to "write an orderly account" (Luke 1: 3, NIV). Luke used research methods to organize the revelation so that it would be lucid to people who hear or study it.

### Inspiration

Inspiration is what happens to a Bible writer as he receives the message from God. It is a major key to understanding how the Bible is put together, and how it affects our personal lives. Second Timothy 3: 16 specifically says "All Scripture is God-breathed" (NIV). The key term here is "God-breathed." The Greek word for "God-breathed" in 2 Timothy 3: 16 is *theopneustos*, and is translated differently in various versions:

Version	Translation
KJV, NKJV	"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"
Amplified Bible	"Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration)"
NASB, NRSV, NLT	"All Scripture is inspired by God"
Contemporary English version	"Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word."
Message	"Every part of Scripture is God-breathed"
New English Bible	"Every inspired scripture has its use" <sup>6</sup>

*Theopneustos* is made up of two Greek words: *Theos*, which means God, and *pneustos*, which comes from the word "to breath;" so it literally means "God-breathed." The word was

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<sup>6</sup>Notice that the *New English Bible* leaves out the *theos* and uses only the "breath" part of the word. This is not a correct translation. It reflects a certain theological viewpoint that does not accept that the Bible is divinely inspired.

sometimes used in the Greek language to refer to all wisdom originating with God, but more specifically to dreams given by God as distinct from natural dreams.

2 Timothy 3: 16 is the only place in the Bible where this word is used, so we have no point of comparison with other texts. We must decide what it means here from its context.

In 2 Timothy 3: 16 Paul connects *theopneustos* to the written revelation given by God.

### The Meaning of "God-Breathed"

What Paul meant when he used this word has been the subject of extended theological study and discussion. The chain of evidence from the Bible itself, however, is clear enough. Paul simply says that the Bible originated with God, not with humankind. Notice how different Bible writers, and Ellen G White, perceived the "God-breathed" process.

The Origins	The Divine-Human Element	The Process of Interpretation
<p>"All Scriptures is God-breathed" – an expression of the creative power of God. Ps. 33:6 "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."</p>	<p>2 Peter 1:21 "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."</p>	<p>John 14:26 "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."</p>
<p>Job 33:4 "The Spirit of the Lord has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."</p>		
<p>"God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. . . . Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings" (<i>The Great Controversy</i>, pages vi, vii).</p>		

### How Inspiration Functions

No one knows all the details about how inspiration functions. The Scriptures contain many examples of the process in action, and we have some indications of an answer in the writings of Ellen G White. Nowhere, however, do we have a fully systematized answer.

#### Examples of how inspiration works:

- Revelation 1:1-3 is the closest thing to an explanation of the process of inspiration.

Notice the sequence in the NKJV:

1. God ("God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place")
2. Jesus ("the Revelation of Jesus Christ")
3. Angel ("signified it by His angel")
4. Prophet ("to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw")
5. Us ("Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near".)

- Jeremiah 1:4 “The word of the Lord came to me, saying . . .” (NKJV).
  - Galatians 1:11 “I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (NKJV).
  - 2 Peter 1:16, 20, 21 “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . . No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (NIV).
- Let’s put Jeremiah, Paul, and Peter together and see how each perceives the experience of inspiration:

<b>Jeremiah</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Peter</b>
“The word of the Lord came to me saying ...”	“All Scripture is God-breathed...”	“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
“Came” is the common Hebrew verb “to be.” The phrase is a formula used 130 times in Jeremiah. “Came” looks like past tense in English, but in Hebrew it is active, indicating that Jeremiah felt an active attachment between himself and God. “Saying” indicates the divine source of the information.	Paul focuses on the creative power of God behind the experience of revelation. In Galatians he says he “received” the information from Jesus	Peter backs up what Jeremiah says. The phrase “carried along” is the same one used at the time of the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is the word used in Acts 27:15, 17 for a tempestuous wind that drives a ship. The prophets, in this perception, were entirely under the Spirit’s motivation.

Though each of these Bible writers perceives the experience of inspiration from a different perspective, each also recognizes that God is the source of the inspiration; and that they have been chosen in a special way to be His spokespersons.

**Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

The most common view of how inspiration works held by many conservative religious persuasions is called “verbal plenary inspiration.” This view holds that in the original manuscripts of the Bible, called “autographs”, the very words of Scripture were inspired—they have no error. This means that in some way or other the Holy Spirit guided the inspiration process so that the words written down were in themselves the words of God.

“By verbal inspiration we mean that the Divine influence which surrounded the sacred writers extended not only to the general thoughts, but also to the very words they employed, so that the thoughts which God intended to reveal to us have been conveyed with infallible accuracy—that the writers were the organs of God in such a sense that what they said God said.”<sup>7</sup>

There is some uncertainty over exactly how this occurs without turning the prophets into secretaries or dictating machines. Most authors are careful to point out that they do not

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<sup>7</sup>Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), p. 11.

believe in what is called a mechanical or dictation theory of inspiration, yet are somewhat at a loss to explain the difference.

Church historian Geoffrey W. Bromiley records that during the time of the early Christian church some people advocated a mechanical view of the inspiration process. For instance, a man by the name of Athenagoras wrote that the Holy Spirit used the prophets "as a flute-player blowing on his flute." Another, by the name of Hippolytus, said the "Holy Spirit plays prophets as a harp or zither." Augustine, the famous North African church father, said that Jesus used the evangelists "as if they were in his own hands."

Something similar occurred during the Reformation period. John Calvin, for instance, talks about the Scriptures being "dictated," and an Anglican by the name of Whitaker said that "God inspired the prophets with what they said and made use of their mouths, tongues, and hands," so that the prophets became "only the organs of God."<sup>8</sup>

### The Seventh-day Adventist Perspective

Verbal inspiration of the non-dictation type tends to sound good in Adventist ears, because it upholds directly the divine origin and authority of the Bible. It is not, however, the Seventh-day Adventist view. Notice the following chart that puts Ellen G White's description of the process alongside that of evangelical theologian Harold Lindsell, a well-known advocate of verbal inspiration.

Harold Lindsell	Ellen White
<p>"Inspiration is taken by some to mean that the thoughts of the writers but not the words were inspired. The idea that inspiration extends to the words (verbal inspiration) as well as the thoughts appears obnoxious to their viewpoint. But thoughts, when committed to writing, must be put into words. And if the words are congruent with the ideas, the words no less than the thoughts take on great importance. Words have specific meanings. To suppose that thoughts are inspired but the words that express them are not, is to do violence even to the thoughts" (<i>Battle For The Bible</i> (Grand Rapids, Mich.: The Zondervan Corporation, 1976), p. 33.</p>	<p>"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.</p> <p>"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" (<i>Selected Messages</i>, book 1, p. 21).</p>

For Seventh-day Adventists, any viewpoint about how the process of inspiration works applies equally to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White, because in our view, both are based on spiritual gifts and come from the same original divine source.

In 1883, the following wording was included in a General Conference vote dealing with the republication of out-of-print Ellen G White writings: "General Conference session action

<sup>8</sup>See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Doctrine of Inspiration." *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1958), pp. 208-210.

of November 16, which reads: . . . “whereas, we believe the light given by God to his servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.”<sup>9</sup>

W. C. White, Ellen White’s son, in a letter to Elder L. E. Froom said about this statement: “You refer to the little statement which I sent you regarding verbal inspiration. This statement made by the General Conference of 1883 was in perfect harmony with the beliefs and positions of the pioneers in this cause, and it was, I think, the only position taken by any of our ministers and teachers until Prof. [W. W.] Prescott, president of Battle Creek College, presented in a very forceful way another view—the view held and presented by Professor Gausen. [probably Francois Gaussen, a Swiss clergyman (1790-1863), who maintained that the Bible was verbally inspired.] The acceptance of that view by the students in the Battle Creek College and many others, including Elder Haskell, has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>*Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883, p. 741. See also *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 96 for the full statement).

<sup>10</sup>*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 454.

## Reading 1

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this Reading.***

# A Short Essay on Views of Inspiration

James W Zackrison

Early Christians assumed that God was the author of the Bible through human beings. This idea followed the pattern of Old Testament prophets. When some later theologians such as Origen of Alexandria began combining secular modes of thinking with Christian ideas, they came up with what is known as the “allegorical” method of biblical interpretation. This idea sustains that the Bible does not mean what it literally says. A “deeper” meaning lies below the surface. So Adam, for instance, may not have actually existed. He is really a “symbol” of how some people think, etc.

These erroneous ideas led later theologians to emphasize God’s role in inspiration and to minimize the human author’s role. Out of this grew a perception that God operated as an irresistible sovereign influence, overruling any initiative originating in human freedom. On this assumption, God becomes not only the author of Scripture, but the actual “writer” of the Bible as well. We need to remember that these ideas developed as attempts to *defend the divine origin* of the Bible. Unfortunately, good intentions don’t always lead to correct conclusions!

Many books on the subject of Biblical inspiration you might consult are written by authors who follow the principles of a school of thought called “reformed theology.” The name comes from the time of the Protestant Reformation, and refers to the theology of John Calvin. Reformed theology places a great deal of emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the idea of predestination. John Calvin was also a believer in verbal inspiration.

Some of the people who followed John Calvin after the time of the Protestant Reformation developed the idea of verbal inspiration almost to the point of making it a mechanical process. The classic example is the book *Theopneustia: The Verbal Plenary Inspiration of Scripture*, by Louis Gaussen. Gaussen (1790-1863) was so far out on this subject that he ran into problems with his own associates.

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Gaussen, in turn, was influenced by an Englishman by the name of Robert Haldane (1764-1842). Robert Haldane and some colleagues founded a mission society called The Continental Society that actively promoted overseas missions (a good thing), but were also heavily involved in the birth and development of futurism, the secret rapture idea, and dispensationalism (not so good).<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley and the Methodists, however, together with a group of churches called Anabaptists, for the most part did not accept the verbal inspiration idea. They believed in what they called “dynamic” inspiration. We Seventh-day Adventists have our roots in Methodism and the Anabaptist movement, and we also believe in “dynamic” inspiration.

However, because of our desire to uphold the inspiration of the Bible and the validity of the gift of prophecy in the person and work of Ellen G White, we have been prone to adopt

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<sup>1</sup>See J. D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 402)

<sup>2</sup>See L. E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. III, Chapter 23 for more information on this subject.

verbal inspiration views without always realizing where they come from, or that the consequence, as William C. White put it, "has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, always increasing"<sup>3</sup>

Some very high profile Adventist pioneers apparently had an underlying belief in verbal inspiration. It came through rather clearly, for instance, in the writings of D. M. Canright after he left the Adventist church (1887). Some of his attacks on Ellen White were on this very point, and his book *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced* has been one of the principle weapons used against us by other Protestants.<sup>4</sup>

### **Verbal Inspiration and the Pioneers**

Verbal inspiration became an issue around 1883 when the original supply of the *Testimonies for the Church* was sold out. Before republishing them, Ellen White wanted to check the grammar and smooth out the writing. Her reasons, as recorded in the Nov. 16, 1883 General Conference Session action, were that "many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection of the writing, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected" (See *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 96).

If you believe in verbal inspiration, Ellen White's words are difficult to understand, especially if you have as restrictive a view like Gausson's in mind. If what a prophet writes is verbally inspired by God, how can the writing have "imperfections" that "pass uncorrected?"

Uriah Smith, editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and some others were really upset. Uriah Smith was not even willing to take the word of Ellen White herself. You can read Ellen White's reply to him in *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, pp. 96 - 98.

Why were some so concerned over this issue? They were afraid that if even the grammar was changed, it would give "enemies" an argument against the Testimonies. Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can easily forget that the early Seventh-day Adventist church was highly apologetic, that is, it was still fighting the battles of 1844, and defending itself against attacks from all sides. For instance, in those days the general church paper, the church's main vehicle of communication, was called the *Advent Review* ("Advent" referred to the Millerite movement) and *Sabbath Herald* (active promotion of the seventh-day Sabbath, a very unpopular idea).

It is true that it is often easier to argue from the position of verbal inspiration because it is an issue you can get a handle on. This kind of literalism seems to appeal to the human mind. Ellen White's answer, however, was: "If our enemies handle it, let them do so . . . I think that anything that shall go forth will be criticized, twisted, turned, and boggled, but we are to go forward with a clear conscience, doing what we can and leaving the result with God" (*Selected Messages*, Bk. 3. p. 97).

### **Verbal Inspiration and The Defense of the Bible**

Coming closer to our own day, during the 1920s there was a major battle in the Protestant world in North America between the "Modernists," liberals who denied the inspiration of the Bible, and "Fundamentalists," those who held that the Bible was a divinely inspired book. A series of books called *The Fundamentals*, and a book entitled *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin B. Warfield, were written during that time. They had

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<sup>3</sup>See *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 96 footnote.

<sup>4</sup>See the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* for information about Canright.

a major impact on fundamentalist thinking. Warfield, a Reformed theologian (Presbyterian), followed some of the ideas of Gausson.<sup>5</sup>

In these controversies Seventh-day Adventists were strongly allied to the fundamentalist camp. Some Adventists actually held influential positions when issues of creationism, temperance and religious liberty were debated, though we disagreed with many fundamentalists on the issues of the Sabbath and our historicist interpretation of prophecy as opposed to the secret rapture idea.

How does this affect us today? Seventh-day Adventists have been, and to some extent continue to be, sociologically and culturally allied to the most conservative wing of the evangelical churches, often still referred to as fundamentalists. In such fundamentalist causes as creation vs evolution, temperance, and religious liberty, we continue to be at the forefront of this alliance.

The much-discussed dialogue between Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse and ourselves in the middle 1950s was an outgrowth of our fundamentalist connections. The cultural roots, and even some theological foundations, of what we call the "fundamentalist right wing" of the Seventh-day Adventist church today are in the fundamentalist movements of the 1920s, and many of the misunderstandings about the role and authority of Ellen G White's writings stem from a belief in verbal inspiration, in spite of all disclaimers to the contrary.

### **Seventh-day Adventists and Dynamic Inspiration**

Our official views on dynamic inspiration have an impact, however. It is interesting that when a well-known evangelical theologian named Clark H. Pinnock recently changed his position from verbal inspiration to what is essentially a dynamic view, his shift was preceded by a shift from a reformed theology predestination view to an Arminian view of the freedom of the will, in other words; from a Calvinist view to a Methodist view.<sup>6</sup> More unique still is, it was a Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Ray Roennfeldt, who pointed this out, something that Pinnock himself had not been conscious of. That shift has also led Pinnock to accept a view on conditional immortality very close to our own.<sup>7</sup>

Another case in point is the shift by Daniel P. Fuller, late Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA., and a leading voice in evangelical theology, to a view of the continuing validity of the law of God similar to our own. This shift only happened when he moved away from verbal inspiration and so called "covenant" theology, (another name for Calvinism or "Reformed Theology").<sup>8</sup>

It is unfortunate, however, that when many of these theologians make this kind of shift, they often go too far, and also reject the validity of the creation story and other historical events in the Bible.

We Seventh-day Adventists believe in the freedom of the human will. It is true that it is "captive" to Satan in the sense that we live in a fallen world, but we still have the power to choose. God does not dictate our choices. We believe, as we have seen, that God gave the Bible through an incarnational process. It is both human and divine in the sense that God used human beings to write it. God is the source, but He is neither the pen, editor, nor the

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<sup>5</sup>His book is worth reading and has some excellent arguments about the inspiration of the Bible.

<sup>6</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, (Harper & Row, 1984).

<sup>7</sup>See *Seminary News*, Andrews University, (Winter 1992).

<sup>8</sup>See *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980).

publishing house. The same holds true for the writings of Ellen G White. This makes it critical that we understand how to interpret the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G White correctly; as the Bible says “correctly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2: 15).

The Bible gives many examples of how revelation and inspiration functioned throughout biblical history, but no exact definitions. Adventist theologian Fernando Canale points out that when theologians deal with this doctrine, they use the words “revelation” and “inspiration” in a technical sense. “Revelation” refers to the process through which the contents of Scripture emerged in the mind of prophets and apostles. “Inspiration,” refers to the process through which the contents in the mind of prophets and apostles were communicated in oral or written forms.<sup>9</sup>

He also points out a caution: Neither the biblical authors nor Ellen G White used the ideas of revelation and inspiration in any technical sense. They used them interchangeably. When most people, however, think about either revelation or inspiration, they think about how it was written down, not how it originally “came” to the “inspired” person.

### **Some History of Verbal Inspiration in the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Within the Seventh-day Adventist church the issue of how inspiration works has usually arisen in discussions about the writings of Ellen G White. Perspectives about the inspiration of the Bible have usually been outgrowths of these debates over the inspiration of Ellen G White.

In the 1920s major battles erupted in the North America over the authenticity of the Bible. A group called “modernists” accepted many of the ideas imported from European universities that the Bible is like any other book, and its data must be proven by historical and scientific facts before it can be accepted as true. This is known today as “higher” biblical criticism, called the “historical critical method” of biblical interpretation.

Some individual Seventh-day Adventists have accepted this idea, but the church as an organization has never accepted it.<sup>10</sup>

Around 1900 a Seventh-day Adventist theologian by the name of W. W. Prescott, president of Battle Creek College, presented “in a very forceful way” Ellen White’s son W.C. White wrote, “the view held and presented by Professor Gausen (the same European theologian mentioned earlier). The acceptance of that view by the students in the Battle Creek College and many others, including Elder Haskell,” he wrote, “has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing.” (See *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, page 454, 455).<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to uphold the validity and authority of the Bible, some very prominent Seventh-day Adventists besides Elder Prescott accepted this evangelical view. For instance, notice the difference between Ellen G White’s view and that of M. C. Wilcox, an editor of the *Signs of the Times*. Wilcox’s view is typical of those who believed in verbal inspiration.

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<sup>9</sup>Fernando Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration, in George W. Read (ed.), *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), p. 50.

<sup>10</sup>For an analysis of how some Seventh-day Adventist scholars try to use a modified version of the historical-critical method, see Angle Rodriguez, “The Use of the Modified Version of the Historical-Critical Approach by Adventist Scholars,” in George W. Read (ed.), *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), pp. 339 – 351.

<sup>11</sup>For more information about W. W. Prescott see Gilbert M. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott: Forgotten Giant of Adventism’s Second Generation* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2005).

<b>M. C. Wilcox</b>	<b>Ellen White</b>
<p><i>Question:</i> "Which is inspired, the original Greek of the New Testament, or the English translation. Or both?"</p> <p><i>Answer:</i> "The original words, of course, the words by which the prophet and apostle spoke. It was not the person who was inspired; it was the God-breathed Word. "All Scripture is (literally) God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3: 16). <i>Questions and Answers</i> (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911, p. 12).</p>	<p>"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. . . . The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. . . 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." — <i>Selected Messages</i>, Bk.1, p.21.</p>

In 1935, well-known Adventist writer and administrator Carlyle B. Haynes, gave a series of lectures at the College of Medical Evangelists (Loma Linda University), later published under the title *The Book of All Nations*. It was revised in 1950, and republished as part of the Christian Home Library Series, the same series that included the writings of Ellen G White. Some people (though this may seem strange), were under the impression that all books in this series (because the covers looked the same) were part of the Spirit of Prophecy. This seems a superficial perception, but it is amazing what happens in people's thinking that contributes to the building of an unwritten, underlying "tradition" that was never consciously intended. Suddenly, the "tradition" surfaces as the "orthodox" view that the church has supposedly "always held as the landmarks."

In *The Book of All Nations*, Haynes say: "God so guides and supervises the transmission of His revelation to others by the men to whom He gave it that their writing, even of things not revealed, is precise and accurate and without error" (p. 213). The implication is that anything an inspired author says or writes is inspired, whether it is a direct revelation or not. It so happens that some people believe exactly that about Ellen G White's writings, and it has caused many problems of interpretation.

Haynes' objective was to uphold the authority of the Bible, but his perception of the way inspiration functions is colored by his fundamentalist sources and his heritage of the ideas propounded by W. W. Prescott and others.

<b>Carlyle B. Haynes</b>	<b>Ellen White</b>
<p>What I desire to emphasize is that his (the writers) intelligence has no part in producing the message. His intelligence receives it; it does not produce it. The message is given to the prophet; the prophet has no part in creating the message. The natural powers of the prophet are active in receiving the message, but passive as far as creating it is concerned. He is in no sense a co-author with God. The messages are given him entire. God speaks through him. He is more than His messenger: he is His mouth. (p. 216).</p>	<p>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.— <i>Selected Messages</i>, Bk. 1, p. 21.</p>

*Fundamental Belief No. 1* of the Seventh-day Adventist church is a clear declaration of full acceptance of the Bible, its authority and historical correctness, without having to become locked into a verbal plenary view:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12).

### **Problems With Verbal Inspiration**

One difficulty is that those who hold to verbal inspiration tend to allow no middle ground at all. So, in their view, even Ellen G White would be in the so-called liberal camp; a view that would be unacceptable to Adventists because of her firm belief in the authority of Scripture.

Some of the problems with the verbal inspiration view are:

- It builds artificial barriers to the solution of difficult passages in Scripture.
- It tends to overemphasize the divine role in inspiration and downplay the human element.
- Adventists who consciously or unconsciously believe in verbal inspiration tend to read Ellen G White through the same eyes, and this leads to difficulties in interpretation.

### **Degrees of Inspiration**

The other side of the coin from verbal inspiration is a view that picks and chooses what is inspired in the Scripture. This is sometimes called a "canon within a canon." This view holds that Scripture is not all equally inspired; some things are more inspired than others. Martin Luther, for instance, believed that the Book of James was of lesser inspiration than Galatians, primarily because he did not like some of the things James said.

This idea has also surfaced in the Adventist church. In 1884, George I. Butler, the president of the General Conference, wrote a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* expounding this idea.

Notice Ellen White's reaction to that series:

"Both in the [Battle Creek] Tabernacle and in the college the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say that some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review*, . . . neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 23.

### **Summary**

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in verbal inspiration, but do believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. We do not distinguish degrees of inspiration. We believe that whether an individual likes or dislikes what the Bible says, responds to it or does not respond to it, understands it or does not understand it, what the Lord says in the Bible is still true.

## **Illumination**

Illumination means that anyone who reads and studies the Scripture needs the help of the Holy Spirit to understand and interpret correctly what he or she is reading or studying.

- “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26, NKJV).

- “We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:12-14, NKJV).

- “ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy. 2:15, NKJV).

- “Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.”— *The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

### Assignment 3

## Revelation, Inspiration, Illumination

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This is a self-graded assignment. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

1. Write out a statement of your understanding of the process of inspiration. This statement is important for you as a Sabbath school teacher because it will set the tone for the way you interpret the Bible and how you present biblical teachings in the class.
2. Explain in your own words your understanding of the meaning of revelation, inspiration, and illumination as each applies to the Scriptures.
3. Below are three statements from three different sources. Which do you feel best express a Seventh-day Adventist view of inspiration? Explain your answer. (The answers are at the end of the assignment. Don't look at them until after you answer the question).
  - a. "Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of God's divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power."
  - b. "A prophet gives forth nothing at all of his own, but acts as interpreter at the prompting of another in all his utterances, and as long as he is under the inspiration he is in ignorance, his reason departing from its place and yielding up the citadel of the soul, when the divine Spirit enters into it and dwells in it and strikes at the mechanism of the voice, sounding through it to the clear declaration of what he prophesies."
  - c. "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice."
4. Have you studied anything in this Unit that has modified what you believed or understood before? Explain.

5. If someone said to you, "I believe in the Bible as an authority for Christians, but the Holy Spirit also tells me what to do. In my church, we depend on the Spirit to guide us into all truth. Sometimes people in the congregation receive messages from the Lord to help guide us. These are just as authoritative as the Bible," how would you answer?

**Answers for number 3**

- a. Statement of Faith, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena CA (evangelical).
- b. Philo of Alexandria, Jewish writer and philosopher from the time of Jesus.
- c. Pre-1980 Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief No. 1.

## Assignment 4

### A Bible Study About the Bible

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

The following texts move through a systematic explanation of the role, place and authority of the Bible in the life of the Christian. You can copy this study and place it in your Bible, or you can mark your Bible so you can give the study with nothing but your Bible in hand.

If you mark this study in your Bible, here's how to do it:

1. On the flyleaf or on a blank page in the back of your Bible write "Understand Bible" – UB 1- 2 Tim. 3:16.
2. Then beside each subsequent text mark UB (No. ) and the reference for the next text. When you finish you will have a chain of 18 texts about the Bible marked in your Bible.
3. You can also use colored pencils or a highlighter to highlight the texts in the chain.

**Example:** In the margin beside UB 1 (2 Tim 3:16) write UB 2 2 Peter 1:21.

UB 1	2 Tim. 3:16	The origin of Scripture.
UB 2	2 Peter 1:21	The role of prophets in transmitting Scripture.
UB 3	2 Sam, 23:1, 2	An example.
UB 4	Jer. 1:4-9	An example.
UB 5	Gal. 1:11, 12	An example.
UB 6	Rev. 1:1,2	The process of revelation.
UB 7	Luke 24:27	The Scriptures reveal Jesus.
UB 8	Luke 24:45	The mind must be "illuminated" in order to understand.
UB 9	Matt. 22:29	Ignorance or misinterpretation produces error.
UB 10	John 5:39	Reading the Bible is not enough. It must be understood.
UB 11	Rom. 15:4	The Old Testament teachings are still valid.
UB 12	2 Tim. 3:15-17	The purpose and usefulness of Scripture.
UB 13	Ps. 119:105	The Scriptures are a flashlight in the dark.
UB 14	Ps. 119: 11	Knowing the Scriptures protects us from sin.
UB 15	Isa. 40:8	The Scriptures are always valid. They do not go out of date.
UB 16	Rev. 22:18, 19	No one has the right to change what God says.
UB 17	Rev. 1:3	Those who accept and follow the Scriptures are blessed by God.
UB End	John 10:35	The Scriptures are infallible and authoritative.

## UNIT 2

### Choosing a Translation

The purpose of this Unit is to study and understand the translation process and how various versions of the Bible may best be used. The Bibles we use today are all translations. Even if you read Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, the three original languages of the Bible, there are no original manuscripts of Bible books in existence.

The Bible was written over about a 1400-year period by some forty different people, in many different circumstances, and was eventually put together in what is known as the "canon" of Scripture. This "canon" is the list of books accepted as authentic and authoritative. Seventh-day Adventists accept and use the Protestant canon of Scripture, 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books, a total of 66 books.

#### What This Unit Is About

This Unit will study three topics:

1. How Bible translations are made.
2. Describe the similarities and differences between commonly used translations.
3. Describe some problems that commonly appear in translations.

When you complete this Unit, you should be able to:

1. Articulate either verbally or in writing the differences between a literal translation, a dynamic translation, and a paraphrase.
2. Be familiar with the origins of the English Bible.

#### The Canon of Scripture

The sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible were originally written in three different languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Unless you can read one of these languages, you are dependent on a translation of the Bible. Even those in the original languages are copies. No original manuscripts exist.

The "canon" of Scripture refers to the commonly accepted list of authoritative books. The chart below shows the differences between three canons. Seventh-day Adventists accept the Protestant canon.<sup>1</sup>

	Jewish	Protestant	Roman Catholic
Law			
Prophets			
Writings			
New Testament			
Apocrypha			

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<sup>1</sup>If you wish to study further how the canon was put together and why Protestants accept the 66 books that appear in our Bibles, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, pp. 179-188 is helpful.

There are many translations —sometimes called “versions” — of the Bible available in English. The one you prefer to use is a matter of personal choice. All translations are to some extent interpretations. It is impossible to transfer text exactly word for word from one language to another. Some versions try to translate as literally as possible, meaning closer to word for word. Some try to communicate thought patterns rather than word patterns.

### **The Seventh-day Adventist Use of Bible Versions**

At various times in our history controversies developed over the use of Bible versions. In the 1930s the primary focus of the dispute was the King James Version vs the American Revised Version. Later the focus of attention was the King James Version vs the Revised Standard Version. Today the focus is mostly on the King James Version vs the New International Version.

You will immediately notice that the primary focus is on whether some other version can take the place of the King James Version. Today we have a New King James Version that is added to the translation mixture.

The historic position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church relative to the use of versions is clear and plain. On June 1, 1931 the General Conference Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist church recorded a vote that reads: “The King James Version and the American Revised Version (the center of the controversy at the time) shall serve us without discrimination. . . . We further record our conviction that all workers, ministers, teachers, authors, editors, and leaders should rigidly refrain from further participation in this controversy, leaving all free to use the version of their choice.” (General Conference Committee Minutes, June 1, 1931). That action has never been rescinded, and still serves as the guiding principle for the use of Bible versions in Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Since there are no original manuscripts, even in the original languages, the texts the translators use are composites. Translators, or translation committees, must often make value judgments regarding variant readings.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why translations?**

There are a number of reasons for translations:

- As better manuscripts, usually meaning older manuscripts that are closer to the originals, come to light, it is possible to produce a translation as close to the original as possible, and as accurate as possible as compared to the original language manuscripts.
- To make the Bible as easy to read and understand as possible. Language changes and previous translations often become difficult to comprehend.
- Translators working with illiterate or semi-literate people groups need to find ways to express Scripture in simple, easily understood language.
- As counterpoints to translations that accept different options for problem texts.

Assume that you are searching for a word to translate “lamp” in Luke 12:35, “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.” Would it be more understandable to use “flashlight” or “torch?” Or would it be best to leave out “lamp” and let the reader figure it out for him or herself why you would burn a lamp?

How about the “holy kiss” in 1 Corinthians 16:20? Try doing that after church some Sabbath and see what the consequences are! Here you have something promoted in the Bible that some cultures do not really approve of. So, can you get around the problem by

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<sup>2</sup>If you are interested in reading more about the details of the use of biblical manuscripts in the original languages, see Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). The book includes a CD with a lot of interesting information.

using “brotherly” kiss, as the *Good News Bible* does? How about a “kiss of peace” as the *New English Bible* translates it? The *Message* translation makes it “holy embraces”, like giving people a hug. Or maybe it would be better to make this phrase more acceptable by translating it “a loving handshake?” as does the *Living Bible*. But then what about those cultures that have no problem at all with a “holy kiss,” but never shake hands? Or maybe a more neutral phrase would be better, like a “warm greeting” as the *Contemporary English Version* has it.

### Types of Translations

There are three primary systems used in translating the Bible. One is called “literal translation,” another is called “dynamic equivalence translation.” The third is called a “paraphrase.” Various versions of the Bible are examples of the use of each of these methods.

### Literal Translations

The literal method of translation attempts to translate word for word, as close to the original meaning as possible. The King James Version, the New American Standard Version, and the English Standard Version (ESV) are examples of this system. For instance, the introduction to the New American Standard Version says: “The New American Standard Bible has been produced with the conviction that the words of Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew and the Greek were inspired by God.” That is a direct affirmation of verbal inspiration. Nevertheless, it makes this version an excellent study tool.

Literal translations sometimes use antiquated ways of saying things in an attempt to reflect the words of the original. They are excellent for study purposes because they try to stick closely to the word order of the original languages. On the other hand, there are various families of manuscripts even in the original languages. So, even the translators who follow the “literal” method must choose which families of manuscripts to use.

### Dynamic Equivalency Translations

A dynamic equivalency translation attempts to understand the *thought* the original writer had in mind, and to translate that thought into understandable modern language. For instance, in 1 Peter 1:13 notice the translations for “gird” and “loins” in the chart below. Which one is most understandable to you?

<b>King James Version</b>	<i>Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</i>
<b>New King James Version</b>	<i>Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully on we grace mat is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</i>
<b>New American Standard</b>	<i>Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</i>
<b>Revised Standard Version</b>	<i>Therefore, gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.</i>
<b>New International Version</b>	<i>Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.</i>
<b>Good News Bible (Today’s English Version)</b>	<i>So then, keep your minds ready for action. Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.</i>

## Paraphrases

A third category of translations are called paraphrases. A paraphrase is not really a translation; it is an explanation, a restatement of the text to make it as clear and meaningful as possible. Sometimes they are closer to a commentary than a translation. Popular paraphrases are the *Living Bible*, the *Message Bible*, and for Adventists, *The Clear Word Bible*.

A paraphrase is good for devotional study, family worship, and in small groups. A paraphrase is not the best for exegetical and systematic study.

The paraphrase of Amos 1: 1, 2 in the *Living Bible* is a good example.

<b>New American Standard (literal)</b>	<b>New International (dynamic equivalency)</b>	<b>Living Bible (paraphrase)</b>
<p>The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.</p>	<p>The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoasha was king of Israel.</p>	<p>Amos was a herdsman living in the village of Tekoa. [All day long he sat on the hillsides watching the sheep, keeping them from straying.] One day, in a vision, God told him some things that were going to happen to his nation, Israel. This vision came to him at the time Uzziah was king of Judah, and while Jeroboam (son of Joash) was king of Israel - two years before the earthquake. This is his report what he saw and heard.</p>

Peter's answer to Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:20 is another example:

<b>King James</b>	<b>New American Standard (literal)</b>	<b>Phillips (paraphrase)</b>
<p>But Peter said unto him, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."</p>	<p>But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"</p>	<p>To hell with you and your money! How dare you think you could buy the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>(Phillips adds a footnote saying that this is an exact idiomatic English equivalent of the Greek text).</p>

### Checking Out a Translation

The following statement from James I. Packer (ed.) *The Bible Almanac*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980). p. 83 presents a good way to check out a translation:

The modern Christian finds himself in a situation that is both bewildering and exciting, because he has so many English translations and paraphrases available. . . . In general, there are three things to check out a Bible translation: (1) its attitude toward the original text, (2) its way of rendering that text, and (3) whether it communicates clearly to the modern reader. People who have no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew can pass judgment only on the last point - whether the translation communicates clearly to them. But they can learn a great deal about the way each version has handled the work of translation by seeing what it does with certain key passages. For example, we shall get some idea of the translators' theological viewpoint by checking these references:

- Deity of Christ - John 1:1; Titus 2:13.
- Atonement - Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.
- Justification - Rom. 3:25; 5:1
- Repentance - Matt. 3:2
- Baptism - Matt. 28:19
- Inspiration of Scripture - 2 Tim. 3:16

### Checking Out An "Adventist" Text: Daniel 8:14

King James	Revised Standard	New American Standard	Living Bible	Good News Bible
Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.	For two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.	For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored.	It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the Temple will be made right again.	It will continue for 1,150 days, during which the evening and morning sacrifices will be offered. Then the Temple will be restored.

The reading in the *Good News Bible* has since been changed to read: "It will continue for 2300 evenings and mornings, during which sacrifices will not be offered. Then the Temple will be restored." The reason for this change will be studied a little further on in this Unit.

### The King James Version: An Old Friend and Some New Relatives

The King James Version has been the most popular Bible version in English for centuries. Some people feel that it is wrong to use any other version.

The King James Version has all kinds of words in *italics*. Usually a word is italicized to indicate special emphasis. When you listen to someone read the Scripture reading in church

on Sabbath morning, you will often hear them emphasize those words. In the King James Version, however, it does mean that at all. *The italicized words have been added so that the English sentence makes sense.*

For instance, Proverbs 20:4 reads: "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; *therefore* shall he beg in harvest, and *have* nothing." Literally, the text reads: "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; shall he beg in harvest, and nothing." The words "therefore" and "have" are added so the sentence makes sense.

The authors of the New Testament wrote in Greek. They used as their Bibles a Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (LXX), meaning "seventy" because 72 men supposedly did the translation around 200 B.C.

### **Latin and Greek Bibles**

In 382 A.D. Pope Damarus asked a man named Jerome to produce a Bible in Latin that would be a "common" version (*editio vulgata* in Latin), hence the name "Vulgate." Jerome took his work seriously. He moved to Palestine, learned Hebrew, and translated the Old Testament directly from Hebrew. For the New Testament, he used the Greek manuscripts he had available. Many Roman Catholic Versions are still based on this Latin Vulgate text. In other words, they are a translation of a translation.

In 1516 A. D., a scholar by the name of Desiderius Erasmus published a Greek New Testament based on the readings of a combination of manuscripts he had available to him. His text reflected the majority readings of these available manuscripts. The manuscripts he had were not very old, however. Usually, the older a manuscript is the closer it is to the original, and therefore likely to be more accurate (although not always). Erasmus' Greek New Testament became known as the *Textus Receptus*, the "received text." The King James Version is based on this text.

Some 200 years after Erasmus' time, older Greek manuscripts became available. Many of today's versions are based on what are called "eclectic" texts, a combination of many readings. Most of these variants (about 90%) are just small things like "an" instead of "a", etc.

Most of these eclectic texts also consider the "context," that is the meaning and message of the Bible book itself, to be as accurate and faithful as possible to the intent of the author.

### **The King James Version**

In 1611 A.D., the King James Version appeared. Even today it is the best known of all English language versions. Some people feel that the King James is the only Bible that is accurate, and no other version should be used. This is not true, however, because contemporary versions are based on manuscripts that had not even been discovered when the King James Version was translated, and are often more accurate.

A more serious problem with the King James Version, however, is that the English language used is outdated, and in some instances has changed so much that a word may mean exactly the opposite as it did in 1611.

There are many people who still enjoy using the King James Version, mostly because it is familiar and customary. Other versions, however, are often much clearer, especially to new Christians and young people not raised on 1611 English. The New King James Version helps solve that problem, as do other version in contemporary English.

### **Examples of Word Changes**

A classic example is the word "let" in Romans 1:13. In 1611, "let" meant to hinder; today it means to permit. So, in the King James Version Paul says he was "let hitherto," a phrase that is almost unintelligible today. The New International Version simply says "I have been prevented from doing so until now," a phrase anyone can understand. The New King James Version has changed word order, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and other language issues to make it more understandable to us today.

An example of how words change in meaning that can have some interesting implications for Seventh-day Adventists because of our standards of personal appearance, is

Nehemiah 13:26. It says that "outlandish" women made Solomon sin. One meaning of "outlandish" today is "unconventional" or "bizarre." The text, in today's English, gives the impression that some heavily made-up, overdressed, and highly bejeweled loose women moved in on Solomon. But "outlandish" in 1611 meant "out-of-the-land," or "foreign." The New King James Version reads simply "pagan women." It would be incorrect, for instance, to use the word "outlandish" in this text in the King James Version to speak against jewelry, etc.

### **The King James Version in the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

In the 1930s an Adventist Bible teacher by the name of Benjamin G. Wilkinson wrote a book entitled *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, a defense of the *Textus Receptus* as the only valid text from which to translate. His basic premise was that other Hebrew and Greek manuscripts were manipulated by the Jesuits, and therefore inaccurate. Dr. Wilkinson's ideas have been picked up and republished in one of the main sources in Evangelical literature in defense of the King James Version, a book entitled *Which Bible?* by David Otis Fuller, though Dr. Wilkinson is pictured as an unknown scholar coming from an "obscure" college on the East Coast (today Washington Adventist University). The book never mentions that he is a Seventh-day Adventist.

The Seventh-day Adventist church did not accept Dr. Wilkinson's position, partly for scholarly reasons, and partly because it was causing a very divisive controversy. (See the previous discussion about the use of versions in the Seventh-day Adventist church).

When the Revised Standard Version was published in the early 1950s, the General Conference produced a book entitled *Problems in Bible Translation*, published by the Review and Herald. It examines some problem texts and outlines the principles of Biblical Interpretation.

Even today some people are so tied to the King James Version that they disallow the use of other translations.<sup>3</sup>

### **Reading 2**

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

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<sup>3</sup>For more information about various versions, see Sakae Kubo and Walter F. Specht, *So Many Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1983). Both authors are Seventh-day Adventists.

# Which Version Can We Trust<sup>1</sup>

by Arthur Ferch

## Part One-A Divine Hand Guiding

The history of modern language translations of the New Testament is fascinating and yet sometimes poorly understood. What happened to the original New Testament writings as they came from the hands of the apostles? What types of witnesses to the New Testament are there? How did the variants (differences) in the sacred text originate, and to what degree do these affect the teaching of the New Testament? How well attested is the New Testament when compared with other ancient writings? What changes did the printed text effect when it replaced the handwritten copies? What is the nature of the *textus receptus* (the received text)? Why did the "standard text" (which is the basis of modern language translations of the New Testament) replace the *textus receptus*? How did Ellen G White and Adventists in the past relate to various versions of the Bible? These are questions frequently raised among our people.

Lack of clarity on these and other issues has occasionally generated contesting points of view and bewilderment, especially when one's position regarding a particular version of the Bible has been made a criterion of orthodoxy.

The purpose of this series is not so much to evaluate modern translations of the New Testament (this has already been done),<sup>2</sup> but rather to trace the history of the books that now comprise our New Testament from the time of their original composition to the present day. Thus we hope to assist readers in gaining an overall perspective by which to assess modern translations in the light of the text of the New Testament existing at the birth of Christianity.

We will begin with the autographs (for example, the original writings as they came from the evangelists or apostles) and note the process by which these documents were copied, translated, and quoted by the writers of the church. Then, turning from the era of handwritten copies, we will trace the history of the printed New Testament text. Next we will survey the fortunes of the received text until the appearance of what is known as the "standard text." The series will close with a review of the stand the Seventh-day Adventist Church has taken on versions in the past and how Ellen G White related to the English language Bible translations of her time.

### The Earliest Witnesses

**Autographs and Copies.** Our story begins with the writing, under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, of the documents that now make up our New Testament. It is these particular books and letters that the Christian church came to believe originated, like their Old Testament counterparts, with men who, impelled by the Holy Spirit, spoke the word of God (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Certainly Paul believed that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 7:40; 1 Tim 4:1), and Peter recognized this fact by claiming that the writings of Paul were on a level with the other inspired scriptures (2 Pet 3:16).

Unfortunately, the original documents did not survive long. Wear and tear, frequent

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<sup>1</sup>Reprinted from the *Adventist Review*, September 6, 13, 20, 27, 1990.

<sup>2</sup>*Uncial* and *minuscule* are terms that describe the type of script in which documents of the New Testament were copied. *Uncial* describes an early script used in the early copies of the New Testament, while *minuscule* represents a much later script, prevalent from the early ninth century A.D.

use, and imperial edicts demanding the destruction of the Christian sacred books account for their early disappearance. However, the early believers did not wait long before they made handwritten copies of the autographs and distributed them among the communities of faith (cf. Col 4:16).

Some of these manuscripts (a word derived from the Latin, meaning "written by hand") traveled hundreds of miles shortly after they were written. This is well illustrated by a papyrus fragment that is considered to be the oldest copy of any portion of the New Testament in existence today. This fragment (called Papyrus #52) was found in Egypt and contains only a few verses of the Gospel of John in Greek. On the basis of the style of script used in the fragment, it has been dated to A.D. 125.

Since the composition of the Fourth Gospel is generally assumed to have occurred in the last decade of the first century A.D. in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, this scrap of papyrus proves the existence and use of a copy of the Gospel of John in a provincial town of Egypt, about 600 miles distant from its traditional site of composition, only about a generation after the Gospel was written.

As congregations began to incorporate the reading and exposition of the Christian writings into their worship services, the need for copies of the New Testament documents became apparent. Newly established churches probably received copies of the New Testament from their founders or through transcribing their founders' manuscripts or borrowed copies. It would appear that in the earliest period there were no professional copying centers (or *scriptoria*, as they were called). Hence manuscripts would have been copied privately by hand. But the practice of copying by hand opened the possibility for divergences or differences in readings (called variants) to creep into the text of the manuscripts.

**Versions.** Christianity entered a world in which Greek was the world language. Greek was spoken and understood in the Western Roman Empire as well as the Eastern, and today few would doubt that all the parts of the New Testament were originally written in Greek. The New Testament writers employed the Greek of daily conversation (for example, the Koine or "common" Greek), though its quality varied from the rather polished language of the book of Hebrews to the "Jewish Greek" of the last book of the Bible.

By the end of the second century A.D., however, radical changes had begun to take place in the empire. The Greek language was confined largely to the eastern portion, the area with the greatest concentration of Christian believers up to the middle of the fourth century. It was among these Greek-speaking Christians that copies of the Greek New Testament continued to be transcribed.

As the Greek language became increasingly confined to the Eastern Roman Empire, however, regional languages began to assert themselves. And since Christianity spread principally among the common people who no longer understood Greek, the need to express the gospel in the local languages of the various geographic regions became compulsory.

Thus by the middle of the third century the Christian church in the western part of the empire (for example, in Italy, Africa, Gaul, and other provinces) became a Latin-speaking church. The medium of communication in correspondence between the churches of Rome and Carthage in North Africa had become Latin by about A.D. 250. In pockets of Syriac-speaking areas, especially in the region around Edessa (now known as Urfa), Christians came to use the Syriac language. Similarly, various Coptic dialects were adopted by monastic orders of Christians in Egypt from the beginning of the third century on.

As the tide turned away from Greek as a world language, translations (also known as versions) of the New Testament writings in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic began to make their appearance. From the end of the second and the beginning of the third century on, we have New Testament manuscripts in the three languages mentioned, with further translations into Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, Slavonic, Ethiopic, and other languages appearing in succeeding centuries. Since these translations of the Greek New Testament originated in distinct geographical areas, they are most useful to the student of the New Testament text in identifying peculiarities characteristic to the manuscripts in the region in which the

translations were made.

**Lectionaries.** Following the Jewish custom of reading passages from the Old Testament during the synagogue services, the Christian church instituted readings from the New Testament for Saturday and Sunday services, as well as other occasions. For this purpose the biblical text comprising the Gospels and Epistles was divided into a system of lessons. These reading installments were called lectionaries. Though scholars are still uncertain as to their date of origin, it is generally accepted that they preserve a reading of the New Testament text that is often much older than the actual date of the lectionary itself.

**Citations by the Church Fathers.** Apart from the handwritten copies of the original Greek New Testament compositions or their translations into regional languages, there is also a considerable body of citations from, as well as comments on, the Christian Scriptures by the Church Fathers, the spiritual leaders of the Christian communities. These patristic (the word comes from the Latin *pater*, meaning "father") citations begin with the second century A.D. The significance of these citations is that they witness to the particular type of New Testament texts popular in the geographical regions in which a certain Father lived or traveled.

### Writing Materials and Style

**Writing Materials.** The earliest known New Testament scriptures were all written on papyrus, made from the papyrus plant. Today we know of 41 papyruses belonging to the period up to the third/fourth century A.D. They have been preserved in the hot, dry sands of Egypt. Papyrus was the cheapest and most commonly used writing material at the time. In later centuries parchment—a much more expensive writing material made from the hides of young goats, sheep, calves, or antelope—came into use and gradually replaced papyrus.

The earliest parchment manuscript of the New Testament dates from the second/third century. But the best preserved and most famous parchments of the Christian Scriptures are the fourth-century *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*.

Parchment as a writing material for the New Testament documents remained in use until the sixteenth century, when it gave place to paper, which the Chinese had introduced to the Western world centuries before.

**Style of Writing.** Scholars classify the handwritten copies of the New Testament according to writing material and style. During the early church period scribes used one particular type of script for nonliterary and commonplace Greek documents and another for literary works. The literary compositions utilized a script called "uncial," which is an abbreviated form meaning "inch-sized." The early copies of the New Testament were written in this more formal book-hand style characterized by Greek capitals in which each letter was separate from the other.

However, this book hand began to deteriorate, and by the beginning of the ninth century a script of small letters in a running hand was introduced for the production of books. This cursive style, called *minuscule* (meaning "rather small"), coexisted with the uncial type of script for about two centuries, after which the cursive replaced the uncial lettering.

Thus the various scripts assist us in dating the New Testament manuscripts in that copies of the New Testament up to the eighth century are exclusively *uncials*, those from the ninth to the eleventh are partly *uncials* and partly *minuscules*, and those from the eleventh century on are wholly *minuscules*. In fact, the number of later *minuscules* outnumbers the older uncial manuscripts by more than 10 to 1.

So far, then, we have noted that no autographs of the New Testament writings exist today. The earliest reproductions of the New Testament consist generally of fragmentary Greek manuscripts, of versions, lectionaries, and patristic citations in various languages. All of these were written by hand either on the cheaper papyrus or the more expensive parchment. The earliest manuscripts were written in the formal uncial script; whereas the later *minuscules* are characterized by a cursive form of handwriting.

With the thousands of handwritten documents, the New Testament is the best-attested

body of writings of antiquity. Yet in spite of the multitude of copies from many locations, there are no two manuscripts that are the same word for word. How can this be explained? We will discuss this issue in our next segment.

## Part Two—"Copying the New Testament"

The original 27 handwritten autographs comprising our present New Testament are represented by more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts. However, most of these are fragmentary and preserve only a few verses or books of the New Testament. Of this number, more than 3,000, made up of uncials and minuscules,<sup>3</sup> contain an uninterrupted text. Another roughly 2,200 are lectionary manuscripts in which the New Testament books are divided into separate paragraphs, arranged according to lesson sequences designed for church worship through the year. In addition to these witnesses, there are an additional 8,000 or so manuscripts of versions supplemented by a multitude of patristic citations (quotations from the early leaders of the church).

The New Testament is better attested by far than any other volume of antiquity, yet despite the large number of witnesses, no two manuscripts are identical in every detail. How can this be? The answer lies in the intricate process of copying and transmission.

With the invention of printing from movable type in the mid-fifteenth century, it suddenly became possible to reproduce an unlimited number of identical copies of a text. Prior to this time, however, scribes had to transmit every document by hand. And all who have ever tried to copy a lengthy piece of written material by hand know only too well how easy it is to introduce discrepancies—technically referred to as "corruptions" or "errors"—into the copy.

As one examines the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, one notices a variety of variations—both unintentional and intentional. Fortunately, however, these do not detract from the Word of God or from its teachings. In the main, such variants are well-meaning attempts by copyists to improve the spelling, grammar, and logical flow of the copies before them.

**Accidental or Unintentional Errors.** Most of the variants in the text arose from purely accidental causes. This is understandable when one remembers the circumstances under which the manuscripts were reproduced. A scribe could easily make an error because of faulty eyesight or hearing, or because he was tired or distracted. Thus the same passage in two manuscripts may differ because the scribe mistook a letter or an abbreviation, or even one word for another that looked like it. Such errors could also result from the illegible handwriting of an earlier copyist.

### Easy to Skip

It was easy for the eye of the scribe to pass inadvertently from one word or group of letters to another similar or identical word or grouping of letters, particularly if they stood near each other. In the process, the copyist would accidentally skip over the intervening portion of text between the two groupings of words, thus dropping a portion of the copy.

This may explain the strange reading of John 17: 15 in Codex Vaticanus, which omits the words in brackets from the verse "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them from the [world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the] evil one." The writer's eye seems to have skipped from the first set of three Greek words preceding "world" to the second

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<sup>3</sup>*Uncial* and *minuscule* are terms that describe the type of script in which documents of the New Testament were copied. *Uncial* describes an early script used in the early copies of the New Testament, while *minuscule* represents a much later script, prevalent from the early ninth century A.D.

identical set before “evil one,” thus creating a discrepancy in the text. Numerous variations of this kind of mistake have occurred.

The reverse problem occurred when the writer’s eye went back from the second to the first group of words, causing him to accidentally copy the intervening words twice instead of once only.

### Similar Words

Confusion also occurred over different words with the same or similar pronunciation. For example, the pronunciation of *ou* and *u* is virtually the same in Greek and may account for the different renderings of Revelation 1:5. Thus manuscripts as early as the third/fourth century carry the verb *lusanti* (“to free”), whereas much later Greek uncials and most minuscule—as well as several earlier versions—carry the verb *lousanti* (“to wash”).

The translators of the King James Version followed the Greek text based on the latter reading and thus rendered Revelation 1:5, “Unto him that loved us, and *washed* us from our sins in his own blood. . . .” Other translations (for example, the Revised Standard Version and the New International Version) render the text, “To him who loves us and has *freed* us from our sins by his blood. . . .”

**Deliberate Changes.** Other divergences in wording arose out of a conscious attempt by scribes to eliminate what they believed were obscurities or problems in the text they copied. As a result, they smoothed out grammatically or stylistically harsh constructions by adding or substituting what seemed more appropriate forms. Other changes were effected in order to clear up historical and geographical difficulties, or because of doctrinal considerations.

Frequently copyists would endeavor to iron out differences between similar or parallel passages. In this process, technically known as “harmonization,” the wording of one passage was assimilated to the differing wording in a parallel passage.

Harmonizations are particularly frequent in the first three Gospels. Thus the reading of the (chronologically) earlier manuscripts of Matthew 19:17 (“Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good.”) was enlarged in later manuscripts to agree with the words of Jesus reported in Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19. As a result, the later copies read, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.”

The same process is evident in the Epistles, particularly the letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Ephesians. Scribes repeatedly introduced into verses of one Epistle words and phrases that originally belonged to parallel passages in the other. An example is Colossians 1:14, which in earlier manuscripts reads, “In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” A few later manuscripts expanded this passage by adding the words “through his blood,” reminiscent of Ephesians 1:7, and thus rendered the verse as it now appears in the King James Version, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

The better a scribe knew his Bible, the greater must have been the temptation to harmonize passages of Scripture in reliance on other similar or parallel passages. Without a doubt, such changes were all done in good faith.

As copies of the New Testament documents increased, scribes sometimes faced the difficulty of having before them two or more manuscripts that rendered the same scriptural passage differently. What were they to do? Rather than opting for one reading and discarding the other, thus running the risk of missing the original wording, scribes tended to combine the various alternatives in the documents that they were producing. The process of amalgamating originally separate readings is called “conflation.”

Luke 24:53 will serve as an illustration. Some early witnesses to this passage read that the disciples were “continually in the temple *blessing* God,” while others note that the disciples were “continually in the temple *praising* God.” Instead of deciding for one or the other variant, later scribes just put the two readings together and thereby constructed a text that reads, as reflected in the King James Version, “And were continually in the temple, *praising* and *blessing* God.”

This tendency to conflate readings, while already present in the earliest period of text transmission, became particularly prominent in later centuries. Copyists most probably reasoned that by copying the various readings the right reading would be preserved. These additions or changes characteristic of *harmonization* and *conflation*, particularly when the expansion assumes a variety of forms, are a strong argument for the secondary form of a particular text.

**Doctrinal Divergences.** Though the early Church Fathers accused the “heretics” and even other Christians of altering the Scriptures to support their individual views, such charges are extremely difficult to assess. While there is some evidence that scribes sought to alter doctrinally inconvenient or unacceptable sayings, or to introduce into the manuscripts proofs for theological tenets, such changes are very rare and generally obvious. They have not compromised Christian teaching.

For example, one scribe in a Latin and Gothic translation of the prologue to Luke imitates Acts 15:28 and seeks to argue that when Luke composed the Third Gospel he also had divine approval. Consequently he expanded the statement in Luke 1:3 (“It seemed good to me . . . to write an orderly account”) by adding after the word “me” the phrase “and to the Holy Spirit.”

We also know Marcion, a “heretic” of the mid-second century, systematically removed all references to the Jewish background of Jesus from the Third Gospel. However, no one today accepts the Marcionite tampering with the biblical text.

Examination of the scribal changes reveals that the copyists moved toward a more orthodox, conservative position rather than to theological liberalism. No scribal changes, whether omissions or additions, have been shown to change any doctrine of Scripture in any way.

**Variants Caused by Translation.** Still other variants arose when the New Testament writings were translated from the original Greek into various regional languages. The quality of translation depended on the translator’s knowledge of both Greek and the language into which he was translating—as well as on the care that he devoted to the task before him. Often further variants were introduced, compounded by the particular form of the Greek copy the translator used and the divergences generated by earlier transcriptions.

### **Development of Local Text Types**

Though the history of the development of the text during the early centuries of the Christian Era is somewhat hazy and still debated, it appears that by the fourth century a new era began that saw the various texts of the New Testament channeled into discrete text types, with distinctive and recognizable traits.

At least four such text types have been identified, named for the geographical area from which they arose and in which they were more prevalent:

1. **Alexandrian** (associated with Alexandria in Egypt). Scholars believe that manuscripts that belong to this group are generally characterized by brevity and austerity. In contrast to the Byzantine text type, there is little evidence of grammatical and stylistic polishing. Given the most recently discovered papyruses of this type, the Alexandrian texts would go back to the early second century A.D.

2. **Byzantine.** This text type is characterized by completeness and lucidity. The scribes who contributed to this text type endeavored to smooth out any harshness of language. They also tended to combine two or more separate readings into expansions of the text (hence confluents). Since the copyists also sought to eliminate any differences in parallel passages, they produced harmonizations.

Of all the so-called text types of the New Testament, the Byzantine as a whole is the latest chronologically. This type of text was largely preserved in the Byzantine Empire, which continued to use the Greek language after other nations had either limited or abandoned Greek as a world language.

3. **Western.** Though the chronological and geographical origins of the so-called Western text are disputed, it is generally believed that it reaches back to the second century

and was in evidence from Egypt west through North Africa to Italy and Gaul (ancient France). The chief characteristic of this text is described as paraphrase. The freedom with which it makes additions, omissions, and substitutions is still puzzling to the experts.

4. **Caesarean.** The debated "Caesarean" text type is believed to date from the early part of the third century. It is considered to have affinities with both the Alexandrian and Western type, and therefore stands somewhat between the two. Though it is called "Caesarean," it may have originated in Egypt, from which it was brought to Caesarea by Origen.

While none of these text types should be seen as monolithic masses or as totally unaffected by other types, they may be recognized, at least broadly, by certain unique family likenesses. As already noted, all of them require a great deal more study, especially the Byzantine, whose text type became popularly accepted and regarded as the authoritative form of the New Testament.

However, a new, revolutionary era in the history of the New Testament would begin with the invention of printing from movable type (ca. A.D. 1450). To this we shall turn in our next segment.

### **Part Three—"A New Era for the Bible"**

With the invention of printing by Johannes Gutenberg, the era of handwritten books came to an end. Now an unlimited number of copies of a document could be reproduced at a rapid rate. The inevitable copying errors, so characteristic of previous centuries when documents were all transcribed by hand, could be virtually eliminated. Identical copies of text now came off the presses. With increased production and resultant reductions in prices, more and more people could afford to avail themselves of at least portions of the Scriptures.

#### **The (Latin) Vulgate a First**

In the Western world of the fifteenth century, Latin rather than Greek was the language of the church. The official Bible was a Latin translation known as the Vulgate, which for the most part was a product of the fourth-century biblical scholar Jerome. Since the Vulgate enjoyed such unparalleled prestige, it comes as no surprise that it became the first Bible to be printed. Published between A.D. 1450 and 1456, it came to be known as the Gutenberg Bible.

#### **The Greek Text of Erasmus**

Sixty years went by before the first printing of the New Testament in the original Greek language. The first to go on the market was that prepared by the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus in 1516.

Regrettably, several features marred the remarkable achievement of Erasmus, not the least of which was the hundreds of typographical errors resulting from the haste of production. In addition, Erasmus confined himself to only those Greek manuscripts available to him in Basel—a half-dozen minuscules, all representative of the Byzantine imperial text, known for its lateness and expansions. None of the copies Erasmus used dated earlier than the tenth century A.D. The early papyri and uncials available to us today were, therefore, not featured in his work.

Moreover, Erasmus relied repeatedly on the Latin Vulgate. Since the twelfth-century manuscript of Revelation that he was using lacked the last leaf containing the final six verses of Revelation 22, he simply translated Revelation 22: 16-21 back from the Latin Vulgate into Greek.

As a result of this heavy dependence upon the Vulgate, there are words and passages in the Greek text of Erasmus that are not found in any known Greek manuscript. Based exclusively upon the Vulgate, these borrowed expressions have been perpetuated in texts that relied on Erasmus—particularly the form that came to be known as the *textus receptus*

(received text).

Because of the great demand for it, however, the first edition of the Erasmus Bible was soon exhausted, and another edition was called for. This second became the basis of Martin Luther's German Bible of 1522 and of William Tyndale's 1525 translation into English.

During the decades following Erasmus a number of Greek New Testaments were issued. By and large these texts reproduced the New Testament reflected in the previous editions of Erasmus, thus perpetuating a text based on a handful of late manuscripts of the Byzantine imperial tradition. This means that the text of the New Testament that came to be accepted in the church as standard was that based not on the earliest available manuscripts, but on later (more recent) ones.

During the sixteenth century the greatest influence on the text of the New Testament since Erasmus was exercised by Robert Estienne (better known by the Latin form of his name, Stephanus). His third edition of the New Testament, published in Paris in 1550, was the first Greek New Testament with an apparatus (for example, a collection of variant readings). Another New Testament published by Stephanus in Geneva was the first to divide a portion of the Bible into chapters and verses. However, the text of both the third and fourth editions of Stephanus was still substantially that of Erasmus.

The King James Version, translated in A.D. 1611, relied on the editions of Stephanus and on that of John Calvin's friend and successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza—a version that also relied heavily on that by Erasmus. This should make clear that the King James Version of the Bible, based as it is on these faulty ancestors, should not be made a criterion of orthodoxy.

### **The Textus Receptus**

Most significant in the seventeenth century among publishers of the Greek New Testament were Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir. The text they reproduced was essentially continuous with that of Stephanus and Erasmus. A statement equivalent to a modern advertising blurb, printed in 1633 in the preface of their second edition, gave rise to the expression *textus receptus*.

The statement read, "Therefore, you now have the text [*textum*] received [*receptum*] by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted." The *textus receptus* did not, therefore, signify that the text printed by the Elzevirs had in some way been received from God, but rather that it represented a text that was virtually identical to the other approximately 160 Greek New Testament editions printed since Erasmus.

The *textus receptus* became the dominant text form of the New Testament for another two and a half centuries, even though it rested on only a few late minuscules, haphazardly selected, and even though it contained readings unsupported by any known Greek witnesses. And having achieved such prestige and dominance, it became the basis for the major translations of the Greek New Testament into our modern languages, including those in English, down to the nineteenth century.

### **Toward a More Accurate Text**

For many years any attempt to improve the *textus receptus* was regarded as tampering with the Word of God. Slowly, however, change began to come. And though Greek New Testaments still retained the received text, divergences in readings were included in lists, technically called an apparatus.

A passion to uncover the most ancient witnesses in order to reconstruct the purest form of the New Testament text consumed scholars such as Lobegott Friedrich Konstantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874). His eighth edition of the New Testament (dated 1869-1872) contained an apparatus that listed all the manuscript evidence known in his time from Greek manuscripts, earlier versions, and patristic citations.

However, though Tischendorf's citations are considered to be total and accurate, he was aware of only 64 uncials, one papyrus, and only a few minuscules. By contrast, we have today cataloged 257 uncials, 93 papyri, and 2,795 minuscules. This is evidence of the more

accurate knowledge we can now have of the original documents of the New Testament.

But with the research and publications of Tischendorf and his immediate predecessors, and with the flood of new materials that became available in the nineteenth century, a change in the form of the New Testament text became inevitable. A new era was about to commence.

### **A New Era Dawns**

Two Cambridge scholars, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892), collaborated in producing the epoch-making work on the New Testament in the nineteenth century. Building on the analytical work of scholars before them, and making full use of the material Tischendorf had provided, these two Englishmen published a monumental Greek text of the New Testament in 1881, consummating 28 years of research.

They examined each variant in the New Testament text in an effort to discover the most probable reading. They examined the relationship of manuscripts to one another, concluding that the genealogy of the manuscripts is more important than their number. Thus they encouraged the grouping together of manuscripts by genealogy or family likeness, proposing several methods by which to trace such genealogy.

In a related effort to arrive at the original text, Westcott and Hort suggested that witnesses that were considered to be trustworthy in clear-cut cases deserve to be given greater weight even where the evidence was ambiguous. Again, numerical strength was not as important as genealogy, and these two scholars endorsed the principle that witnesses to the New Testament text should be weighed rather than counted.

These principles led them to make the boldest break with the past yet. Though some previous Greek editions of the New Testament had somewhat timidly sought to break loose from the received text, the work of Westcott and Hort ended the long reign of the *textus receptus*. Their edition of the Greek New Testament rested on an application of textual analysis in the evaluation of variant readings, rather than on a few late miniscules chosen somewhat randomly.

### **Reaction**

Given the centuries-long popular acceptance of the *textus receptus*, it was no surprise that churchmen became alarmed that these scholars should totally reject the claim that the *textus receptus* was the original text of the New Testament. Opponents labeled their efforts both bad theology and bad textual analysis, and called for a Greek text based on the wording of the majority of the more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts, regardless of their age or textual quality.

Opposition also came when the translation committee of the English Revised Version of 1881-1885 adopted as their underlying Greek text a form that agreed substantially with that prepared by Westcott and Hort. Similarly, the producers of the American Revised Version of 1901 relied largely on a text similar to that of the two British scholars.

### **Expanding Knowledge**

Further study, research, and discoveries of manuscripts since 1881 have challenged several of the conclusions of Westcott and Hort. New manuscripts of the New Testament, especially papyri older than some of the documents previously available, have surfaced, throwing new light on the New Testament text.

Nowadays, some scholars believe the genealogical method has its limitations, and several modern versions of the New Testament (for example the Revised Standard Version and New International Version) are more eclectic or selective in their choice of readings. Consequently, editors pay less attention to questions of date or families of witnesses and no longer follow one text type slavishly. Instead they concentrate on individual readings and assess them on their own individual merits.

A hundred years after Westcott and Hort, and several editions of New Testament texts later, the major editions of the Greek New Testament have cut themselves totally loose from

the *textus receptus*. The reader of a Greek New Testament today faces what the scholarly and popular press designates the “standard text.” This text is published by the United Bible Societies (which include American, Scottish, German, Dutch, and British Bible Societies).

By and large, the standard text is identical to the Greek text associated with the names E. Nestle and K. Aland, which has dominated the scene for 80 of the past 100 years. But the text of Nestle and Aland was designed primarily for the textual technician. Thus the standard text came into existence, at least in part, in response to a more general need felt since the mid-1950s for a Greek New Testament that would meet the requirements of several hundred Bible translation committees around the world. It rests on an extensive and ongoing review of all Greek manuscripts as early as the second century, of versions, and of the citations of New Testament citations of the Church Fathers.

Readers of the Greek standard text will notice that there are omissions of complete verses or shorter units<sup>4</sup> with which they had been familiar in the past. These longer or shorter units had been included in virtually every edition and translation since Erasmus.

Modern language translations are increasingly adopting the practice of the United Bible Society’s text or that by Nestle and Aland Greek, eliminating verses, phrases, or words that were inserted into the biblical text under the influence of the Byzantine textual tradition. This practice has proved troublesome for many who have come to accept these additions as an integral part of the Word of God, even though they were introduced into the biblical text simply by well-meaning copyists. Their removal is considered blasphemy.

We need to remember, however, that such omissions (or additions) are never vital to Scripture. And if they were not found in the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament, which themselves were extensively distributed, it is most likely that these portions were not part of the original New Testament as it came from the apostles’ text. Therefore, their omission now cannot negatively affect the New Testament text. Moreover, there are often parallel passages elsewhere in the New Testament, and within the same textual tradition, that already include the wording omitted in a particular passage. In other words, the teachings of Scripture have not suffered because of these omissions or expansions.

### **Two Important Questions**

First, to what extent do the divergences in the text divide and therefore diminish the authority of the New Testament? Second, to what degree do fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith rest on disputed readings?

In response to the first question, we need to keep in perspective the total picture regarding variants. Significant variations occur very rarely. Most variants are the result of chance or normal scribal tendencies. The fact is that the amount of agreement between editions of the Greek text (particularly those published during the past century) is far greater than has been suspected. These attempts to approximate the original wording of the New Testament writings assure us that *the variants in no way jeopardize the overall witness of the New Testament*.

As regards the second question, the variants do not endanger doctrine. Sir Frederic Kenyon, a former director and librarian of the British Museum, after discussing variations of the New Testament text, says:

“It is true (and it cannot be too emphatically stated) that none of the fundamental truths of Christianity rests on passages of which the genuineness is doubtful. . . . No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading. . . . It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the

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<sup>4</sup>E.g., Matt 17:21; 18:11; 23:14; Mark 7:16; 9:44, 46; 11:26; 15:28; Luke 17:36; 23:17; John 5:3b-4; Acts 8:37; 15:34; 24:6b-8a; 28:29; Rom 16:24; 1 John 5:7-8a.

text of the Bible is certain. Especially is this the case with the New Testament.”<sup>5</sup>

The number and variety of witnesses to the New Testament make the New Testament scriptures the best attested documents of antiquity. Despite the number of variants, most of which are trivial and devoid of any theological significance, God’s message to humanity is constant and trustworthy. The substance of the New Testament is certain, and none of the fundamental truths of Christianity rests on a disputed reading.

## **Part Four-“The Proliferation of Bible Versions”**

Did Ellen G White make use of any version of the Bible other than the King James? Has the Seventh-day Adventist Church ever taken a position on the question of modern translations?

The first major revision of the Bible, following the organization of the Adventist Church, was the English Revised Version, published between 1881 and 1885.

It is significant that during the 1880s as that version was being introduced to the public, the Review and Herald issued several articles designed to acquaint its readers with the progress, reception, and value of the English Revised Version, as well as its relationship to the King James Version. Generally the articles were reprints from other journals. However, they also contained favorable reactions by prominent Adventist writers to this new revision of the Bible. Adventists, one would assume, were generally comfortable with this version, the underlying Greek text of which was substantially that prepared by Westcott and Hort.

After the American Revised Version was published in 1901, however, lively debate arose over the benefits or otherwise of this new revision. Finally, on March 20, 1930, the General Conference Committee took an action relative to the merits of both the King James Version of 1611 and the American Revised Version of 1901. The decision of 1930 was confirmed by another General Conference Committee action of June 1, 1931. It implored the constituency to avoid controversy over the use of versions. The committee action included the following advice:

The reasonableness and soundness of the General Conference Committee’s action (of March 20, 1930) to the effect that these two versions (the 1611 King James and the 1901 American Revised) shall serve us without discrimination are amply seen in the situation which has developed from this controversy within our ranks. . . .

We further record our conviction that all our workers, ministers, teachers, authors, editors, and leaders should rigidly refrain from further participation in this controversy, leaving all free to use the version of their choice.

We also appeal for the sincere cooperation of all our workers in endeavoring to preserve the unity of our people.

### **New Concerns Spark Deeper Study<sup>6</sup>**

Following the publication of the Revised Standard Version from 1946 to 1952, concerns were expressed in the Adventist Church particularly about the rendition of certain passages

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<sup>5</sup>Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, rev. by A. W. Adams (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958), 49-55.

<sup>6</sup>For this section I am indebted to the publication of the Committee on Problems in Bible Translations, *Problems in Bible Translation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954).

that, it was feared, could potentially affect Adventist doctrine and Adventist prophetic interpretation. In response, the General Conference appointed a committee, known as the Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, to study the scriptural passages concerned.

This group submitted its report to the General Conference Committee in January 1954 and received authority to publish its findings. Subsequently, another decision was made to expand the report to include additional material dealing with subjects such as the biblical manuscripts, versions, problems of translation, and the principles and problems of biblical interpretation. Finally, *Problems in Bible Translation* was issued by the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1954.

*Problems in Bible Translation* recognizes that Bible translations stand in need of revisions for a variety of reasons. These include recent discoveries that impact on our understanding of the biblical world as well as the need to speak the ever-changing language of the people.

For example, findings in archaeology after 1870 enriched our understanding of Bible lands and times beyond anything known previously. The discovery of numerous portions of Scripture as well as of official papers and letters of ordinary people dating from Bible times significantly improved our knowledge of the biblical languages. To this should be added the fact that since the nineteenth century, scholars were given access to previously unknown ancient and almost complete manuscripts of the Bible.

These and other factors necessitated revisions of certain points in Bible translations. The resulting revisions contributed to more accurate renderings in English and elimination of words, phrases, or verses that had once been taken for granted as Scripture but not found in the ancient manuscripts that had recently become available.

Moreover, since living languages change, later revisions cannot merely repeat the familiar, but sometimes archaic, words or phrases of earlier translations. Revisions are obliged to speak the idiom of the day if they are to be relevant to a changing society. With this in mind, the committee concluded that we should not expect a final or last-word revision that might exclude other translations.

In the light of the position taken by the church previously, the Committee on Problems in Bible Translation saw no need to comment on the merits or demerits of the Revised Standard Version. The committee recognized it as another version, having as much value as other Bible translations.

### **Ellen G. White's Position**

This position on the use of Bible translations by the Adventist Church comes as no surprise when one reads the writings of Ellen G. White. She was acquainted with the process of text transmission, and did not hesitate to use modern language translations. She knew that changes in wording had been introduced by copyists and translators over the centuries. To those among her readers who were overly concerned about possible mistakes in the copies or translations of the Scriptures she responded:

"This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purpose of God."<sup>7</sup> Her own practice was, "I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible."<sup>8</sup>

It is significant that Ellen G White quoted from the English Revised Version soon after its publication and later also from the American Revised Version when it became available. She cited from both the text and marginal readings of the versions and, according to her son,

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<sup>7</sup>*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 16.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, 17.

W. C. White, instructed her literary assistants to quote from these translations whenever their renderings were preferable.

Apart from the English Revised Version and the American Revised Version she also used the wording of several other less known translations. In the publication of *The Ministry of Healing* in 1905, Mrs. White employed 10 texts from the English Revised Version, more than 50 from the American Revised Version, two from Leeser, four from Noyes, and more than 10 marginal renderings.

By comparison to her use of the King James Version, her quotations from the other versions were sparing. Concerned for the older members who were unaccustomed to any but the King James Version and therefore might be perplexed to hear a different wording, she advised her son, W. C. White, that it would be better not to use the Revised Version from the pulpit. She feared that such a practice might introduce questions into the minds of the hearers as to why the revisers had changed the biblical text and why these alterations were being used by the speaker.

It is evident, then, that Ellen G White did not hesitate to use versions other than the King James Version. At the same time she revealed a pastoral concern for those who all their lives had heard or read only the King James Version and knew nothing about the transmission of the New Testament. She did not condemn the revisions, nor did she make the use of the King James Version a criterion of orthodoxy.

Acquainted with the history of the New Testament text and following the example of Ellen White, the historic position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been to recognize value in the various translations and to leave its members free to use the version of their choice.

While we may be grateful for these translations designed to meet a variety of needs, the profusion of versions has also caused some bewilderment. In years gone by, the use of one version aided memorization and reading of Scripture by the whole church, whereas the present multiplicity of translations has limited such practices. One solution to this problem might be for individual churches to agree on a particular version to employ for public use. Copies of the designated version could be made available by the churches for their communal use without inhibiting the use of other translations.

As long as our understanding of the biblical world changes, and as long as language continues to be dynamic, we cannot expect a final or exclusive translation of the Scriptures. The King James Version is one among many translations of God's Word through which the Lord unfolds His love and purpose for a lost world. The English versions stand alongside hundreds of translations of the Bible into other languages through which God shares His message with humanity. Ultimately, the desire to hear God speak to us is far more important than debates about which particular English version of the Bible we should use.

## Assignment 4

### Working with Bible Translations and Versions

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This is a self-graded assignment. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

1. Articulate either verbally or in writing the differences between a literal translation, a dynamic equivalency translation, and a paraphrase.
2. **Case study:** Someone in your Sabbath School class attempts to prove a doctrine using the *Living Bible*. What problems might you run into and how would you solve them?
3. In the King James Version Revelation 22:14 reads "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they might have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Quite a few translations substitute "wash their robes" for "keep his commandments." How would you go about finding out why this is so?

(This is a much used "Adventist" text, so how could you use it if the latter translation turned out to be accurate?)

4. Someone in your class gets really upset because you are using the New International Version instead of the King James Version. They claim that the Lord especially inspired the King James Version and no other translation is accurate. How would you solve this problem?
5. What are some of the differences and the similarities between the King James Version and the New King James Version

## Figuring Out What to Include and What to Leave Out

In John 8: 1-11 in the King James Version you find the story of the woman taken in adultery. If you look in the New English Bible, it's not there. You only find a footnote that tells you to go to the end of the Gospel of John where the story appears as a kind of appendix. The New International Version begins the Gospel of John with a note saying that the earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11. Why do these translations say that?

It so happens that only one of the earliest Greek New Testament manuscripts contains this story. The others all leave it out. Manuscripts from the Middle Ages have it, but it floats around; sometimes included after Luke 12:38, and sometimes at the end of John. However, you do find the story recorded in the writings of many church fathers who wrote around 300 - 400 A.D., so there is evidence that it is a true story. Why does it float around so much?

Volume five of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (p. 985) explains the textual problems, but there is an interesting story about why it might have been left out. The famous church father Augustine (d. 430 A.D.) says the story was removed from the original text to avoid scandal and because some Christians were of slight faith. The problem seemed to be that in the view of some the story teaches too much forgiveness and might lead people to go ahead and commit adultery on the premise that the Lord would forgive them afterwards, so they apparently took it out to "protect" the flock.

If you read the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, you will readily see why he would be in favor of leaving it out. Augustine had a very tough personal battle with sexual issues and apparently needed his own personal "protective wall," even at the expense of approving the modification of the Biblical text.

This illustration points out, nevertheless, how much work and study is involved in solving some of these issues when translating the Bible.

## Another Example: Daniel 8:14 and the Cleansing of the Sanctuary

Daniel 8:14 is a key text in Adventist theology. Look again at the different ways it is translated on the previous chart. Why does this happen?

This is a huge subject, and many books have been written on it. Our purpose here is only to explain why different versions use different translations so you can see how important it is to know what you are talking about as a Sabbath School teacher, or when giving a Bible study.

The word "cleanse" (King James Version) is the issue here. Only in this verse is the Hebrew word *sadaq* translated as "cleanse" in the King James Version. It is usually translated by "vindicate," or "justify," or some similar word. The translators of the King James Version apparently followed the LXX (the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) which uses sanctuary language in many places. They took the symbolism of the ritual washings and used the word "cleanse." Since the context refers to the sanctuary, William Miller assumed that the sanctuary referred to the earth, and he connected "cleansed" with the final judgment.

Later Adventists connected "cleansed" with the *heavenly* sanctuary, still a fundamental belief of our church today (Fundamental Belief, No. 24). On the other hand, the restoration of the sanctuary and how its restoration solves the attacks of the "little horn" is what Daniel is talking about. The translation of the Revised Standard Version "restored to its rightful state," and the New American Standard Version "properly restored" are closer to the originals than is "cleansed."

Note that the basis of the translation or interpretation is not about an isolated word, but the context indicating why that word is used as it is.

Notice the "evenings and mornings" translation rather than "days" as in the King James Version. This is a literal translation of the Hebrew, but it simply means "days" (See Gen. 1:5).

Problems begin to arise, however, when you get to the paraphrases. Notice that the *Living Bible* talks about only the "daily sacrifice" being restored, not the whole sanctuary.

That is very different. The original edition of the *Good News Bible*, has only 1150 days instead of 2300 (That has been changed to 2300 in later editions). Where did that come from? The translators of these two versions are *assuming* (notice the word) that Daniel is referring to a specific historical event, an incident involving a Syrian ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes around 200 B.C. They figured out how long that ruler oppressed the Jews and tried to make the number of days in the Bible fit that incident. *This is interpretation, not a translation*, and that is the problem with paraphrases. You have to be very discerning to pick up the difference.

### **Summary**

Choose a translation that is clear, understandable, and as accurate as possible.

## UNIT 3

### Principles of Interpretation

The purpose of this Unit is to describe and illustrate four principles as guidelines for interpreting Scripture.

This Unit will study these principles arranged in three topics:

1. The basic principles of interpretation.
2. Some problems in interpreting the Bible.
3. Sources of information that will help you understand more fully this subject.

When you complete this Unit, you should be able to:

1. Articulate either verbally or in writing four basic principles of Biblical interpretation.
2. Articulate either verbally or in writing how you would go about using these principles.

#### What Hermeneutics Is About

The word “hermeneutics” is from a Greek word that means “to interpret.” Its origins are in Greek mythology. The Greek god Hermes supposedly brought messages from the other gods to mortals, so *hermeneutics* eventually became the science and art of laying down the rules by which the Bible should be interpreted; then using those rules to interpret and apply Biblical information. There are many such rules, but in general they fall under four fundamentals:

1. The Bible is its own interpreter.
2. Scripture means just what it says unless there is obvious reason to think otherwise.
3. The Bible is a divine-human book. The writers were part of their historical period and their own culture. The question must be asked, “What did it mean then, and what does it mean now?”
4. Know the difference between interpretation and application.

As a Sabbath school teacher/discussion leader, it is vital to understand these principles of interpretation. What are outlined in this Unit are principles known as “historical-biblical.” Many Bible students use a system known as “historical-critical.” Here is a definition of each of these ideas.

- The “*historical-biblical*” school of thought begins with the premise that the Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, what it says does not have to be verified by outside sources. Because the Bible claims to be an inspired book whose origins can be traced back to God Himself, it cannot be treated as just another piece of literature. Since it is of divine origin, the only standard of comparison available is itself. Therefore, the Bible can only be compared to itself, and it develops its own guidelines for interpretation.
- The “*historical-critical*” method begins with the premise that the Bible is like any other book. Therefore, what it says must be proven by empirical (scientific or historical) evidence. For instance, according to those who accept this theory the “story” of Adam and Eve is a nice story that teaches some good lessons, but we can’t believe Adam and Eve really existed until we have some DNA evidence to prove it.
- Some Seventh-day Adventist scholars attempt to use some pieces of the historical-critical method, but they inevitably run into problems about the authority of the Bible.

### Reading 3

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

## **The Use of the Modified Historical-Critical Approach by Adventist Scholars**

By Dr. Angel M. Rodriguez,

"Appendix B" in George W. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005).

**Note:** *This is a technical article, but the information is important for a Sabbath School teacher to know.* The word "critical" in this article refers to those who look at everything "critically", through the eyes of history and science.

### **1. Critical Scholarship and the Adventist Faith**

From its very inception, the use of the historical-critical approach in the study of the Bible faced strong opposition from Christian communities but was able, through a long process of conquest, to become the reigning king in biblical interpretation. Today, only a few Christian communities remain opposed to it. Adventist opposition, like that of other denominations, is determined by its understanding of the nature and the authority of the Scriptures. Adventist doctrines and life style were formulated as a result of the study of the Bible, considered by the church to be a revelation of God's grace and will for the human race. The church always has had a high view of the Bible, based on a number of fundamental convictions related to its nature and purpose. Such convictions had a direct impact on the way the church came to interpret the Scriptures.

#### **Foundational Premises**

1. *We believe that the Bible is essentially a religious document, a revelation from God to the human race that answers the fundamental questions of human existence: Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going? Without that revelation we would be lost and disoriented in this world. Actually, it is the phenomenon of revelation, the divine origin of the Bible, that makes it unique (2 Tim 3: 16). Such conviction forces us to ask ourselves to what extent a particular methodology used in the interpretation of the Bible will support or perhaps undermine our view of Scriptures. If the Bible is treated like any other book, to be analyzed like any other book, we should expect tension and conflict between the church and modern scholarship.*

2. *We believe in the unity of the Scriptures.* This unity is based on the fact that the real Author of this holy document is God Himself, that Christ is its very center, and that the same message of salvation is proclaimed throughout the Bible. In modern biblical scholarship, the unity of the Bible is usually rejected or questioned. It is considered to be a diverse and at times, contradictory collection of theologies, promulgated by its different authors. Consequently, the concepts of divine revelation and inspiration are denied or re-defined in such a way as to make the human element more determinative than the divine in the formation of the final product.

3. *We believe that, although the Bible is not primarily a book of history or science, when it intentionally addresses historical and "scientific" issues, it is reliable.* Consequently, we are interested in the historical dimension of the Bible. However, we have rejected historical methodologies used to reconstruct the history of Israel in open contradiction to the historical picture found in the Bible itself. Here, authorial intent is extremely important and must be taken into serious consideration in the hermeneutical process. We want to retain the obvious meaning of the text unless the Scriptures themselves point in a different direction.

4. *We believe that the Bible is its own interpreter.* The basic question of hermeneutics is to be solved by allowing the Bible to interpret itself. In other words, Scripture is to be interpreted from within Scripture itself by listening to it and comparing a passage with similar ones. Even in cases of discrepancies, we must begin with the Bible in seeking to understand or clarify them. In some cases, harmonization are possible; in other cases, one may perceive that the biblical author was omitting information in order to make a particular point. Archaeology may provide information that clarifies an apparent discrepancy, but the Bible is the final arbiter of meaning. If there is not enough evidence to explain or harmonize the discrepancy, we must simply acknowledge it.

Historical, religious and cultural contexts are useful in interpreting the Bible, but the ultimate arbiter of meaning is the Bible itself. Modern biblical scholarship seeks to place the Bible in its own cultural milieu, which in itself is appropriate, but, in many cases, it uses archaeological and epigraphic [ancient manuscripts and writings] materials to reconstruct the history behind the text or to determine the meaning of the biblical text. This approach tends to create tensions with the church, because it seems to presuppose that almost everything in the Scriptures is culturally determined and consequently tends to undermine the normativeness of the Bible for us today.

Critical scholars are sincerely interested in understanding and interpreting the biblical text. They use a system of interpretation that they feel is the correct one. In fact, they base their system on a very simple conviction: The Bible is the result of the historical, religious and cultural contexts in which the biblical writers lived and wrote. Hence, they do not assign to the Bible a unique status in terms of its origin—it is not a revelation of God—considering it to be a book like any other book.

Critical scholars presuppose that historical certainty is impossible, because any conclusion is always subject to revision (methodological doubt). Therefore, what one finds in any document cannot be considered to be true unless submitted to critical analysis. Second, their method dismisses the idea of singular events in history. The laws of nature operating in biblical times were the same ones we have today (principle of analogy). This rules out the miraculous. Third, the flow of history is the result of the cause-effect continuum. Every historical event can be explained by looking into the immanent causes that produced it (principle of correlation). This rules out divine intervention in human affairs.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Adventist use of the Modified Historical-Critical Methodology**

Some Adventist scholars have been interested in the use of the historical-critical method, making it a topic of debate since the late 1960s. Few have argued for the use of the method in its classic form, most have argued for a modified use that, supposedly, excludes the presuppositions that traditionally accompany it.<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental question has been: Is it possible to use the historical-critical method without being influenced by its critical presuppositions? Some have answered in the affirmative while others deny it. One could perhaps say that, at the theoretical level, it could be possible to postulate the possibility of separating the method from its presuppositions. Some evangelical scholars claim to have been able to do precisely that. The question is whether in practice it is possible to fully separate presuppositions from methodology.

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<sup>1</sup>For a recent summary of principles used by historical-critical scholars, see John J. Collins, "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters*, eds. W. H. Propp, B. Halpern and D. N. Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1990), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>See, Jerry Gladson, "Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants," *Spectrum* 18.4 (1988): 19-31; Larry Herr, "Genesis 1 in Historical-Critical Perspective," *Spectrum* 13.2 (1982): 51; John Brunt, "A Parable of Jesus as a Clue to Biblical Interpretation," *Spectrum* 13.2 (1982): 35-43; and Robert M. Johnston, "The Case for a Balanced Hermeneutics," *Ministry* 72 (March 1999): 10-12.

Our concern in this appendix is to evaluate the claim that a modified use of the historical-critical method is compatible with the Adventist understanding of the Bible. We will do this by looking at the results of studies made by Adventist scholars, using the modified method, rather than by dealing with abstract methodological arguments for, or against, its use.

One of the problems we face in our task is that those who argue for the modified system have not stated clearly the modifications they are making to the historical-critical method. The tendency is to argue that the most significant difference is located in the fact that now the interpreter presupposes that God does intervene in human affairs. In a few cases the modifications made to the method are so significant that it is questionable whether one should still call it the historical-critical method. Let me cite a couple of examples.

Jerry Gladson examined the role of form criticism in Adventist scholarship to explore the extent to which it could be used by Adventist scholars. First, he recognized the problem:

Probably no one would question the fact that if Seventh-day Adventist theology were to incorporate the Form Critical method into it, with all its presuppositions, Adventist theology as we now know it would cease to exist, only to be supplanted by an evolutionary methodology.<sup>3</sup>

For Gladson, form criticism in its modified form meant willingness to acknowledge that there are different literary genres in the Bible: "Probably no Seventh-day Adventist would quarrel with the identification of specific literary genres within the Bible per se," Gladson writes, "Very plainly, the Bible contains literary genres. . . . It would be very reasonable—with an inspirational model—to see God giving a revelation of Himself and His truth in the accepted literary forms of the day."<sup>4</sup> But, can this acknowledgment be called a type of form criticism? Gladson was aware of the problem: "It would be one thing, however, if form criticism stopped with the mere labeling of genres. But critics are not content with this. In fact, the descriptive process is only a prelude to the real objective—to get behind the text and to trace the development of the genre."<sup>5</sup> Hence, his final conclusion was that an Adventist theologian "should not disregard the evidence brought to view by Form Criticism. He is willing to accept the classification of genres generally, but distinguishes between this and the presuppositional origin of the genres."<sup>6</sup> What he is suggesting had, in principle, been done by Christian interpreters long before there was a historical-critical method;<sup>7</sup> hence one must ask whether it is correct to call it form criticism.

A second example is found in a paper written by Niels-Erik A. Andreasen on the use of tradition criticism by Adventist scholars. He recognized the problem that we confront: "The tradition critical emphasis on the primacy of the pre-literary (in the sense of pre-Scriptural) traditions would undercut our view of revelation and would thus be unacceptable as a method."<sup>8</sup> Then he suggested,

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<sup>3</sup>Jerry Gladson, "Form Criticism and the OT: A Critique," unpublished paper, Oct 1974, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>M. J. Buss, "Form Criticism, Hebrew Bible," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), pp. 406-409.

<sup>8</sup>Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "Tradition Criticism: A Seventh-day Appraisal," unpublished paper, Oct 1974, p. 7.

We accept the existence of common near Eastern parallels [sic] to OT laws, social customs, religious practices, and literary formulations. It would thus be proper for us to ask about “traditions” behind or parallel to OT customs, practices, and literary formulations with the understanding that the revelatory/inspirational quality of such parallels lies in the OT adoption or usage of them.<sup>9</sup>

The suggestion is a good one, but, is it proper to call the study of common customs and practices in Israel and the ancient Near East “Tradition Criticism”?

Douglas R. Clark and John C. Brunt have edited two volumes of an introduction to the Bible for college-level teaching in which we seem to find the full application of a modified historical-critical approach to the study of the Scripture.<sup>10</sup> These volumes were written to be used not only by Adventist students but by others who “take seriously both up-to-date scholarship and an affirming faith stance.”<sup>11</sup>

The two possible audiences made the writers careful not to promote an Adventist position throughout the documents. That makes it difficult to know at times where the authors stand on some of the methodological issues. Nevertheless, in most cases, the methodology of the authors is quite clear. Here we have a good opportunity to examine the results of the use of a modified historical-critical method and its impact on certain important areas of Adventist biblical interpretation.

It must be clearly stated that Adventist theologians who use the modified historical-critical approach (those with a more critical attitude, that is to say, who, in some cases, and for some logical reason do not accept at face value what the Bible says) believe that the Scriptures are inspired by God and that they contain a message of salvation for the human race. But in order to reconcile a critical approach with the revelation/inspiration of the Bible, they have to define revelation and inspiration in a way that allows a critical attitude with respect to the Scriptures. They make some concessions to the postulates of critical scholarship, because they believe that to some extent such scholarship is useful for the proper interpretation of the Bible. It is their firm conviction that, in using this approach to the Scriptures, they are not attempting to destroy the church and/or its message. That commitment should be acknowledged.

### **3. Modified Historical-Criticism and Basic Biblical Teachings**

We explore briefly three main areas of biblical interpretation that are extremely important in Adventist theology and doctrine: Creation, law, and apocalyptic prophecies. Those areas have a direct impact on how we understand the origin of human existence on this planet, the doctrine of the law and the Sabbath, the Adventist prophetic interpretation, the church's self-understanding, and its mission and message to the world. We explore the results of how applying the modified historical-critical approach affects those specific areas.

*1. Creation Narrative.* Several Adventist scholars have applied the modified historical-critical method in the study on Genesis 1. Among them is Larry Herr, whose goal was to show “how might the use of the ‘historical-critical’ method of Bible study affect the interpretation of Genesis 1.”<sup>12</sup> The biblical writer, he argues, was addressing an issue important to his audience and used imagery and language that could be easily understood. Herr places the chapter within ancient Near Eastern history and culture and concludes that

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas R. Clark and John C. Brunt, eds., *Introducing the Bible*, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup>Herr, p. 51.

the author is using ancient cosmology (organization and operation of the cosmos) to communicate a particular message, a cosmogony, or an understanding of the ultimate origin of the world.

Therefore, the key for the interpretation of the Creation narrative is found, according to Herr, in the cosmologies of the ancient Near East. Cosmologies, he adds, "change through history as knowledge changes, so that we can distinguish the cosmology of Genesis 1, for example, from the cosmology prevalent today."<sup>13</sup> Most of his analysis of the biblical text serves the purpose of showing that the cosmology of Genesis is ancient and incompatible with modern scientific knowledge. This particular perspective seems supported by Douglas R. Clark when he writes that Genesis 1 and 2 "celebrate the creation of the earth and universe as the ancients perceived them."<sup>14</sup>

This means there is no fundamental difference between the results of the traditional historical-critical approach and the modified one. They both relegate the narrative to the category of ancient Near Eastern creation stories. However, Herr will argue that the cosmology of Genesis 1 is meaningful in the sense that it is the vehicle used by the biblical writer to communicate a permanent and valid truth, namely that "the cosmos was created by the one true God in a miraculous and ordered way."<sup>15</sup> It is the cosmogony of Genesis 1, what it says about the ultimate origin of the world, that is to be preserved and not its cosmology. Herr would probably argue that it is there that the elements of revelation and inspiration are to be located in the story.

In a sense Herr has gone beyond what most traditional historical-critical scholars would be willing to state. He modified the method only by finding a place in the narrative in which the divine is still active. He rejected one of the presuppositions of the method but the method itself remains the same. The tendency is to argue that the Creation narrative is not describing how God brought everything into existence but rather that He is the Creator of an orderly world. This was also the conclusion reached by Richard L. Hammill. He argued that

through the inspiration-revelation process, God gave truth about creation which could not be learned by human observation and reason—namely, that everything that exists owes its origin to God who by his spoken word made things to be which had no existence before. . . . A division must be made between such cosmogonic, theological truth and cosmological details taken from the culture of the time.<sup>16</sup>

Clark summarized the issue, stating, "The biblical record addresses the 'who' of creation more than any other concern."<sup>17</sup> And Raymond F. Cottrell prefers to use the terms "message/revealed truth" and the "historically conditioned form" of the Creation story. The message is that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and not how He created.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>14</sup>Douglas R. Clark, "Genesis," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup>Herr, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>Richard L. Hammill, "Creation Themes in the OT Other than Genesis 1 and 2," in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspective*, ed. James L. Hayward, (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), p. 260.

<sup>17</sup>Clark, "Genesis," p. 103.

<sup>18</sup>Raymond F. Cottrell, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to the Natural World," in *Creation Reconsidered*, pp. 195, 196, 199, 203.

OT scholars usually acknowledge that the biblical writer believed that what he was writing in Genesis 1 happened the way he was telling it.<sup>19</sup> But the modified use of the historical-critical method does not seem to take authorial intent at face value. It is in using the critical aspect of the method that the interpreter is forced to raise questions about the trustworthiness of what the text is clearly saying (Content Criticism). It is to be expected that the church will resist the application of the modified version of the historical-critical approach to the Creation narrative or the story of the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3).

2. *The Origin of the Law.* Critical scholarship has rejected the biblical description of the giving of the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. The prevailing view is that the law is probably of post-exilic origin, although some elements of it may go back to pre-exilic times. The formulation of the law codes in their final form developed through an extended process. The historical-critical scholar, using the appropriate critical tools, claims to be able to reconstruct that history. In that process, the origin and the development of the Israelite legal system is reconstructed along the lines of sociological processes that do not take God's intervention in human affairs into account.

Adventist scholars who use a modified version of the historical-critical method have not described in detail how it is to be applied to the legal material of the OT. Douglas R. Clark has addressed the issue, but it is difficult to know to what extent his views are representative. We really are dealing with the question of the composition of the Pentateuch, but our present focus relates to the legal material.

Clark begins his discussion on the law by pointing out that what we find in the OT in its present form concerning the origin of the legal material is not unique to Israel. The ancients believed that "all laws derived directly from the deity, no matter what their content or nature. In fact, most law codes from the ancient world depict either narratively or graphically the divine source of the material."<sup>20</sup> He seems to imply that it is against this ancient Near Eastern practice that we need to interpret the narrative of the giving of the law recorded in Exodus.

Clark accepts that God spoke to Moses at Sinai and that some of the material that we find in the Pentateuch goes back to that experience.<sup>21</sup> But he does not inform us concerning how much of that material goes back to Moses. Concerning the Ten Commandments, he states,

Most scholars feel the Ten Commandments as written on the stone tablets were likely extremely brief: "You shall have no other gods before me;" "Remember the Sabbath day;" "You shall not murder;" etc. A comparison with the list in Deuteronomy 5 indicates enough variation to support the idea.<sup>22</sup>

Here is the historical-critical developmental approach to legal formulations, according to which, simple laws developed through a long period of time into more complex ones, crafted to address the social needs of the people. The implication is that it is impossible to know exactly the laws that God gave to the Israelites at Sinai. The historical account of the origin of the law as recorded in the Bible is significantly modified and a historical reconstruction is made, using a historical-critical methodology.

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<sup>19</sup>See for instance, Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Account of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Douglas R. Clark, "Formation of the Old Testament," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Idem, "Leviticus," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup>Idem, "Exodus," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 118.

The present form of the book of Exodus testifies that all the laws recorded there were given to Moses by God. But the modified use of the historical-critical method concludes that there is behind the text a long history of development. For instance, most of the laws of the Covenant Code "assume settled existence in agrarian communities like those of earliest Israel during the period of the judges;"<sup>23</sup> The implication is that they hardly could have existed in the form we have them in the Bible during the time of Moses and that, therefore, they were not given by God to Moses just as the biblical text states.

With respect to the legal material found in Deuteronomy, Clark finds attractive the position of Moshe Weinfeld:

It is beyond doubt that the book of Deuteronomy contains ancient laws from the period of the Judges or even from the time of Moses. But it also contains an element from the period of Hezekiah-Josiah, and this is the element connected with the centralization of the cult. Finally, there is also a Josianic element that finds expression in the final literary edition of the book.<sup>24</sup>

Clark comments, "If this is the case, we likely have another illustration of ancient, inspired 'authorship' as a community project or collection (perhaps over a long period of time) rather than simply the creative efforts of a single individual."<sup>25</sup> Due to his respect for the Scriptures, he introduces the element of divine inspiration, which most critical scholars will simply ignore.

But since Clark accepts the basic conclusion of critical scholars concerning the historical development of the legal material of the OT, over against what the biblical text itself explicitly states, he is forced to broaden his definition of inspiration. God is no longer revealing His will to a prophet; He is inspiring a community as it creates laws based on the challenges it confronts. He seems to be talking about divine guidance but not about divine inspiration. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen states,

SDA's see a much closer and direct tie between the OT materials and the authors of their literary formulations, and we presuppose or imply a view of revelation which places great emphasis on the individual author. In our view, the Scriptures are inspired because of a revelatory experience of individual authors, not a revelatory experience of a people at worship, of their leaders of such worship, nor in the process of Israel's remembrance of past history, etc.<sup>26</sup>

From the Adventist perspective the fundamental question when dealing with this issue is the authority of the law. On what grounds can we say that the Ten Commandments as we find them in the Bible came from the Lord and, therefore, have absolute authority over us? The suggestion that God was speaking through the community or the process of codification is too nebulous and lacks clear biblical support to provide a solid and permanent foundation for a divine law that is authoritative across time and culture?<sup>27</sup> The modified version of the critical method has provided for us a sociological description of the origin of the Israelite

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>24</sup>Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 84.

<sup>25</sup>Douglas R. Clark, "Deuteronomy," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup>Andreasen, pp. 7-8.

<sup>27</sup>For a similar comment see the Adventist scholar Giovanni Leonardi, "Alla ricerca di una lettura comune della Bibbia," *Adventvs* 9.1 (1996): 34.

law, supposedly under divine guidance. If that conclusion is right the normativeness of that law is seriously threatened.

3. *Apocalyptic Interpretation.* In Adventist thinking, the interpretation of biblical apocalyptic texts is of extreme importance. In fact, Adventists define themselves as an apocalyptic movement, proclaiming the future irruption of God in human history in a majestic way that will bring to an end modern oppressive and corrupted social and religious institutions. Apocalyptic thinking is so entrenched in our consciousness and identity as a church that to try to extricate it is to risk the existence of this movement. Any system of interpretation that would appear to threaten our understanding of biblical apocalyptic literature will meet sincere opposition from the church. It has always been the church's position that our system of interpretation is the one provided by the biblical text itself and that it is, therefore, non-negotiable.

The historical-critical approach to biblical apocalyptic deprives it of any predictive element. In this view, the nature of that type of literature is determined by the cultural needs of the people to whom it was addressed. According to this sociological approach, oppressed people found hope in the formulation of a future in which oppressive powers will be totally destroyed and a divine system of government established. The authors of books such as Daniel and Revelation were writing to their own communities, encouraging them and instilling hope where there was hardly any. Those books, it is said, bear no divine revelation of future events in world history.

The modified historical-critical method shares most of those sentiments and conclusions. It is fundamentally preterist in its focus. [*"Preterist" means that all the prophecies of Revelation were already fulfilled in the past, like "pre-" in today's English*]. Richard Coffen argues vigorously for a preterist approach in the interpretation of Revelation.<sup>28</sup> John was writing to the church of the first century A D, and not describing the history of the church during the coming centuries. Coffen is careful to point out that the book has been of value to future generations:

This does not mean that the Revelation had no significance for generations future to John's day. It appears that each succeeding generation of Christians took John's apocalyptic message seriously and gathered hope from it. However, because John has written the Revelation for his friends, the biblical scholar will look for the current events of the early centuries for possible seed fulfillments of John's vision."<sup>29</sup>

This is an intriguing statement. Coffen believes that the message of hope encoded in the symbolism of Revelation is still meaningful to us, but he does not explain what that message is. He seems to consider the book to be a prophetic one whose prophecies were fulfilled in the early centuries but calls the fulfillments "seed fulfillments." Does that mean that the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation have multiple fulfillments? He does not answer that question. Nevertheless, Coffen invites Adventists "to reevaluate and reformulate the presuppositions they take to the Apocalypse."<sup>30</sup> According to him, if this is to be done, it should be done along the lines of preterism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Richard W. Coffen, "John's Apocalypse: Some Second Thoughts on Interpretation," *Spectrum* 8.1 (1976): 27-31.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup>Ernest J. Burse, who wrote the chapter on "Revelation," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 2, endorses the historicist system of interpretation even though he does not explicitly state it (pp. 278-279).

Alden Thompson wrote the chapter on Daniel in *Introducing the Bible* and provides another opportunity for comparison and analysis.<sup>32</sup> In terms of the dating of the book, he seems to lean toward a sixth-century date.<sup>33</sup> He describes the different approaches used in the interpretation of Daniel, without explicitly aligning himself with any of them. Yet, he sympathizes very much with the position taken by the evangelical scholar John E. Goldingay in his commentary on Daniel.<sup>34</sup> According to Thompson, Goldingay incorporated into his preterist interpretation idealist elements; that is to say, he accepted critical presupposition, according to which, the book of Daniel contains a message for the post-exilic community, and it should be interpreted in the light of the history of that period. But at the same time, Goldingay allowed for multiple applications of the prophetic material.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to know to what extent Thompson is willing to appropriate Goldingay's views. But the combination of critical scholarship and idealist interpretations of Daniel is nothing new for Adventists. Desmond Ford made a herculean effort to merge the two, but the church rejected his views. Adventists believe that Daniel and Revelation contain prophecies that cover the full span of history and reveal God's plan for His church, particularly at the end of the cosmic conflict. The merging of preterism with historicism weakens and could even destroy the Adventist understanding of the message of those books and the role of the church today.

### Summary and Conclusions

Our exploration of the use of the modified historical-critical method by Adventist scholars revealed that the modifications they introduced are minimal and consist mainly of the recognition that God is still active in the production of the final form of the text. When this new approach is applied to key Adventist doctrinal issues, the result becomes damaging to Adventist doctrines and to the biblical understanding of the nature of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures.<sup>36</sup>

Adventist scholars who argue for the modified version have accepted some of the most important results produced by the historical-critical method. The existence of the four hypothetical sources (JEDP) used in the production of the Pentateuch seems to be acknowledged.<sup>37</sup> Redaction criticism appears also to be accepted as the process through

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<sup>32</sup>Alden L. Thompson, "Apocalyptic: Daniel," in *Introducing the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 525-44.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 536-537.

<sup>34</sup>John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: Word, 1989), pp. xxxvii-xl.

<sup>35</sup>Thompson, "Daniel," p. 531.

<sup>36</sup>It is true that Adventist hermeneutics has some common elements with historical criticism, "but there are significant differences in the way the common elements are used. Note the function of historical background studies . . . . Historical Adventist hermeneutics seeks to know how background contributed to events and teachings as the Holy Spirit transmitted divinely-given content within a local environment. In contrast, the historical critic pursues how such an interpretation of events as reported in the Bible could have arisen from the background such as we know it" (George W. Reid, "Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics," BRI Shelf-Document, p. 2). It is also important to remember that many of the procedures used in historical-critical studies were used before there was a historical critical scholar, but they were not used to do content-criticism of the Bible.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Clark, "Genesis," pp. 90-91; and Alden L. Thompson, *Inspiration*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), p. 158.

which the text reached its present form.<sup>38</sup> This could lead to the conviction that the Bible is not always historically reliable, making it necessary to reconstruct the history of Israel. One gets the impression that those using the modified critical methodology also would argue for the social evolution of most, if not all, of the Israelite institutions. There is a strong tendency to consider much of the Bible to be culturally determined.<sup>39</sup> In some cases, we even detect a tendency to reject the historicity of a biblical narrative because of its strong emphasis on miracles (e.g., the story of Jonah).

It is true that many evangelical scholars who have a high view of the Bible have been using a modified historical-critical method in their study of the Bible. But it is much more difficult for Adventists to follow their example because of the centrality of Scripture in Adventist thinking and lifestyle. Among Adventists the absence of a creedal statement of a permanent and unalterable nature makes our doctrinal statements vulnerable to significant change and modification if our hermeneutic changes. This is not the case in most Christian denominations. Therefore, the use of the historical-critical method has posed less threat to churches with creedal documents. The fact that the Bible is our only creed means not only that we believe in the principle of *sola scriptura*, but also that we recognize the Scriptures to be unique. They should judge not only doctrines and lifestyle but also any biblical methodology.

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<sup>38</sup>See, Thompson, *Inspiration*, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup>This is a foundational conviction for Alden Thompson, and it leads him to conclude that the Bible is a casebook, not a codebook (see *Inspiration*, pp. 202, 208, 180-183).

The historical-biblical principle of hermeneutics implies that it is the responsibility of a Sabbath School teacher to show that biblical history is true. This takes systematic study. There is always a progressive learning pattern. Notice the following diagram about how the Bible describes going from immaturity to maturity in biblical knowledge and application.

Immature	Progressive Learning Pattern	Mature
<p>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you <i>because you no longer try to understand</i>. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <i>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.</i> (Heb. 5:11-14 NIV).</p>	<p>But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness. (2 Tim. 2:16 Christian Standard Bible).</p> <p>Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. (2 Tim. 2:23 NIV).</p>	<p>What you heard from me, <i>keep as the pattern of sound teaching</i>, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Tim. 1: 3, 4 NIV).</p> <p>But as for you, <i>continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of</i>, because you know those from whom you learned it (2 Tim. 3:14 NIV).</p> <p>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, <i>a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.</i> (2 Tim. 2:15 NIV).</p>

### Common problems

If as a Sabbath School teacher you do not follow proper rules of interpretation, you will inevitably use rules derived, however unconsciously, from some combination of the following:

1. **Your own personal opinion.** To have a personal opinion is legitimate. To present your personal opinion as Bible truth is not legitimate.
2. **What personal background perceives.** "Personal background" refers to whatever the mind has absorbed from sermons and classes, the clichés subconsciously believed, and the "standard" way of expressing things that is part and parcel of the vocabulary of any religious group.
3. **The authority you feel the church has** in passing on a standard way of expressing its beliefs and practices, though you may never have personally analyzed whether or not what you are saying is really what the church believes.
4. **Your personal hobbyhorse.** Many teachers have a special point of emphasis that is very important to them. It might be a particular doctrine, or some point of Christian lifestyle, or some view on church organization or something else. Unless you are very careful, you may well end up, however inadvertently, emphasizing that point in nearly every class you teach.

#### Reading 4

- **Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.**

### Important Statements on Biblical Interpretation in the Writings of Ellen G. White

The following statements from Ellen White point out the importance of teaching Bible truth correctly

**Don't make the Bible agree with you.** "*In searching the Scriptures you are not to endeavor to interpret their utterances so as to agree with your preconceived ideas, but come as a learner to understand the foundation principles of the faith of Christ. With eager interest, with fervent prayer, come to the Word of God, that you may know what is truth, manifesting the same spirit as did Nathanael when he earnestly besought the Lord that he might know the truth. Light will come to every earnest seeker for truth, as it came to Nathanael.*" — *Sabbath School Worker*, June 1882.

**Rely on the authority of Scripture.** "'When Jesus spoke to the people, they were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. The scribes had labored to establish their theories, and they had to labor to sustain them, and to keep their influence over the minds of the people, by endless repetition of fables and childish traditions. The loftiest models of public instruction consisted largely in going through heartless rounds of unmeaning ceremonies, and in the repetition of frivolous opinions. The teaching of Jesus inculcated the weightiest ideas and the most sublime truths in the most comprehensible and simple manner, and "the common people heard Him gladly.'" This is the kind of instruction that should be given in our Sabbath-schools." *Sabbath School Worker*, April, 1889.

**What to do with preconceived opinions.** "In your study of the Word, *lay at the door of investigation your preconceived opinions and your hereditary and cultivated ideas.* You will never reach the truth if you study the Scriptures to vindicate your own theories. Leave these at the door, and with contrite heart go in to hear what the Lord has to say to you. As the humble seeker for truth sits at Christ's feet, and learns of Him, the Word gives him understanding. To those who are too wise in their own conceit to study the Bible, Christ says, 'You must become meek and lowly in heart, if you desire to become wise unto salvation.'" *The Signs of the Times*, Oct. 1903.

"Only study the Word of God with a purpose. You need to do this. Do not study with a purpose to confirm your ideas, but bring your ideas to the Bible to be trimmed, condemned or approved in the light of the Old and New Testaments. Make God and your Bible your constant companions. Study the *Testimonies* with the same purpose, with much prayer." *The Ellen G White 1888 Materials*, "Vision at Salamanca," p. 942.

"Let the Bible explain its own statements. Accept it just as it reads, without twisting the words to suit human ideas." "What is the chaff to the wheat?" *Loma Linda Messages*, 1903, p. 55.

#### Questions That Go Down the Wrong Track

"Those giving Bible studies before a class need to guard these special matters, lest their minds lose the very essential points they wish to impress upon the minds of the hearers. When the door is thrown open to allow everyone to ask questions confusion of ideas often results because someone presents a question full of unbelief. Through this one questioner the whole class of hearers have started a little matter in another channel and thus that

precious Bible study is spoiled. Let all questions be presented in writing after the class exercises close. This will give the teacher time to know whether a question is suitable to be presented—whether it flashes a ray of light and file, or tends to deepen the dense shadow that Satan is constantly working to cast athwart human minds; whether this question will drop into some heart as the sowing of tares, or will be for the education and enlightenment of the class who have presented themselves as learners. The Bible study may be so conducted as to confuse minds rather than produce more thorough thought and enlightenment. If the ideas expressed by these questions will lead to a lower and more common level the class have been robbed of solid principles which concern their eternal welfare. There is produced a multiplication of words without corresponding progress in the Bible doctrines which are so much needed to be brought into families and churches; there has been a multiplying of expressions with little substantial knowledge, little increase of solid principles." *The Ellen G White 1888 Materials, "Diary Entries,"* 9. 879.

### **A problem in the time of Jesus**

"Those whom He addressed regarded themselves as exalted above all other peoples. To them, they proudly boasted, had been committed the oracles of God. The earth was languishing for a teacher sent from God; but when He came just as the living Oracles specified He would come, the priests and the instructors of the people could not discern that He was their Saviour, nor could they understand the manner of His coming. Unaccustomed to accept God's Word exactly as it reads, or to allow it to be its own interpreter, they read it in the light of their maxims and traditions. So long had they neglected to study and contemplate the Bible, that its pages were to them a mystery. They turned with aversion from the truth of God to the traditions of men." —*Manuscript Releases, Volume Nineteen (Dated and Undated Diary Selections on a Wide Variety of Topics, Apparently Written in 1890 and 1891),* p. 253.

1. In your own words, what have you learned for this Reading?
2. What do you consider the one most important principle in this Reading?

### **Basic Principles of Interpretation**

Because the Bible was written over many centuries by various people under differing circumstances, and in languages that most of us do not read or speak, it must be interpreted to be understood.

Part of the interpretation is done for us by the Holy Spirit through illumination. When the Bible is studied honestly and prayerfully, the Holy Spirit exercises guidance so that we interpret it correctly. This is what Paul meant when he said that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Unless as a Sabbath School teacher you stick to the basic rules of interpretation, you will not be teaching the true meaning of Scripture, and you will fall into the trap of using one of the four common errors mentioned above.

#### **Principle 1: Scripture is its own interpreter**

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic church insisted that the church had the power to interpret Scripture, and that this power came through the anointed priesthood. Over against this idea, the Protestant Reformers said that Scripture is its own interpreter, and that everyone can interpret Scripture through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

What this means is that the understanding of any passage should come from other Scriptures. It also means that the Bible contains one harmonious system of doctrine.

This is also called the "analogy of faith" principle. Analogy means that you put apparently unlike things together so they make sense. This principle says that you put apparently unlike Biblical texts together by looking at the whole of Scripture to see what it says on an issue, and then draw a conclusion. When you bring all the "analogies" (ideas about a single topic) together, you should end up with "one faith" (Eph. 4:5).

### **Exegesis vs Eisegesis**

This principle involves Biblical exegesis. The word *exegesis* is Greek for "to pull out." The opposite is *eisegesis*, which means "to put in." It is our job as Sabbath School teachers to "pull out," not to "put in." So, when some commentator writes, for example, that the fish in the Book of Jonah was not a real fish, but a symbol of the Babylonian captivity that "swallowed" Israel, he is engaging in *eisegesis*, not *exegesis*.

For instance, A printed sermon on tithe paying once arrived from an overzealous stewardship director who used as his text one sentence from Luke 16:5, "How much owest thou unto my lord?" The point of the sermon was that we all ought to ask ourselves if we are returning an honest tithe. That is a perfectly good question.

The problem was that the person who asked it *in this text* was a crook who was trying to cheat his employer. The author of the sermon found some words in a text that said what he wanted to say, but they were not the right words from the right place. By applying the rule that Scripture is its own interpreter, and doing a little more study, the author could have found plenty of legitimate texts that teach the point he wanted to get across.

### **Thought units and exegesis**

The Bible is put together in units that go from large to small. The best way to do *exegesis* is to start with the largest unit and work down. You can also start with the smallest unit and work up, but this method has a much greater tendency to error in interpretation, because you do not have the whole picture in mind. The following diagram shows how the basic units of Scripture fit together.

#### **The entire Bible**

**Books of the Bible**

**Chapters**

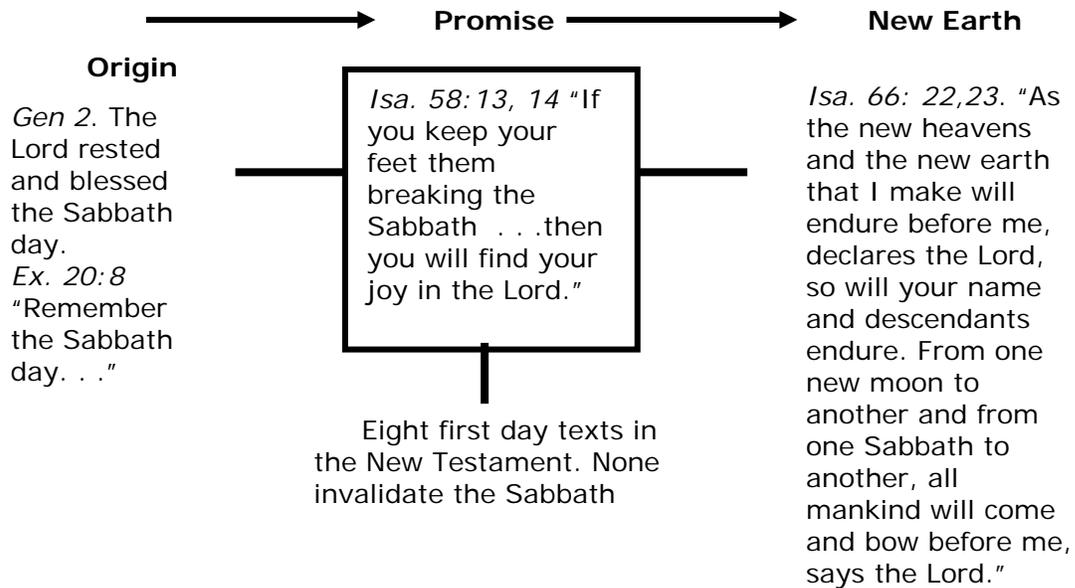
**Paragraphs**

**Verses**

**Sentences**

**Words**

The following diagram shows how we Adventists validate the seventh-day Sabbath using the Bible as its own interpreter principle. The table that follows shows how some arguments opposing the Sabbath violate that principle.



View	What it says	Problem
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	The church changed the day	Shifts the authority from the Bible to the church
<b>Liberal view</b>	The Jewish people adopted an existing pagan day of worship	Speculation – no evidence
<b>Protestant view No. 1</b>	The Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week	No biblical evidence
<b>Protestant view No. 2</b>	There is no longer a Sabbath. Sunday is just a memorial to the resurrection. It is not a sacred Sabbath	Accepts some texts and ignores others
<b>Protestant view No. 3</b>	The Old Testament Sabbath was only a Jewish ceremony. History and church tradition validate Sunday as a convenient day of worship.	Ignores the Genesis account of the origin of the Sabbath. Church tradition has no veto power over the Bible
<b>Protestant view No. 4</b>	The "Jewish Sabbath" symbolized the dispensation of "law". The Christian Sunday symbolizes the dispensation of "grace." The one has nothing to do with the other.	Denies the unity of Scripture

## **Principle 2: Scripture means just what it says unless there is obvious reason to think otherwise**

### **What this principle means**

This principle means that you use normal grammatical rules to interpret the language of Scripture. When John writes in Revelation, for instance, about an enormous red dragon with seven heads and seven horns and seven crowns on his heads (Revelation 12:3) he is obviously talking about a symbol. On the other hand, when Paul says he can't remember the names of all the people he baptized in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14-16), he means just that — he forgot.

Nothing doctrinal should be derived from a text except what is evident by the grammatical construction of the language. In Galatians 4: 21 - 23, for instance, Paul says that Abraham had two sons by two different women. Then he states "These things may be *taken figuratively*. . ." and he then uses an illustration he has derived from Abraham's two sons and their mothers. The section from v. 24 to v. 27 is *obviously an illustration*, and vv. 28 - 31 is an application of the illustration.

### **The context**

The context of a passage of Scripture is all-important. The context is what immediately precedes and follows a given piece of Scripture and forms a complete argument or thought. Only as you fit a given piece of Scripture into its context can you get at the authentic meaning.

A classic example is Peter's vision of clean and unclean animals in Acts 10. This passage has been used innumerable times to prove that Christians can eat whatever they want. But the passage has nothing to do with diet. All you have to do is read vv. 1-7 to get the preceding context, and vv. 17 - 23 to get the following context. In verse 28 Peter clearly says what the vision meant. The whole issue had to do with the gospel going to non-Jews. It had nothing at all to do with diet.

### **Two Dangers**

There are two dangers that need to be avoided in applying this rule:

**1. Extreme literalism.** Some people apply this rule so hard and fast that they make human language into almost a mechanical activity. People don't talk that way. When Paul uses the phrase "commands people everywhere to repent" in Acts 17:30 he does not mean that the only way to preach the gospel is to be tough, harsh and demanding. He means that Jesus' sacrifice has already been made, and now people are called to a decision.

For instance, a person once took a class in vegetarian cooking from a lady who introduced the subject by saying "This is a tough message and I intend to be sure you get it, because God commands people everywhere to repent — and eat right!" This is only using Bible words, but has nothing to do with the context the words come from.

**2. Failure to properly identify literary language.** The writers of the Bible did not speak "heavenly" language. For instance, when Ezekiel saw the "wheels" (Ezekiel 1) he did the best he could to describe what he saw, but no artist has yet been able to quite make it out and visualize it. When John described a figure on the throne looking like "jasper and ruby" in Revelation 4:3, he did the best he could to describe in human language an incredibly brilliant heavenly scene, using gem stones he was familiar with as points of reference.

A literary device refers to a way of explaining something or a particular way of writing or speaking. There are many literary devices used in both the Old and New Testaments. Knowing how these devices work, and being able to spot them, helps in interpreting the Scriptures.

For instance, a visiting speaker once said in a sermon on an island in the Caribbean that something was "as slow as molasses in January." If you live in New England, you know what that means. But on a tropical island that has only rainy and dry seasons, no cold winters—

and no molasses, it meant nothing. The translator was stuck. There were no words in the local language for what had been said.

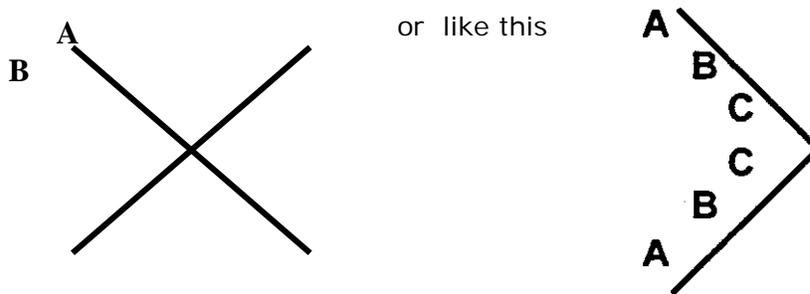
**Parallelism.** Hebrew writing makes a lot of use of parallelism. Parallelism means that a thought is either repeated or used in contrast in the same grammatical unit. For instance, Proverbs 10:31 is a contrasting parallel:

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,  
But the perverse tongue will be cut out. (NKJV)

Sometimes the parallel reemphasizes the same point. For instance, Psalms 93:3, 4 emphasizes that God is all powerful and in command of the universe by saying:

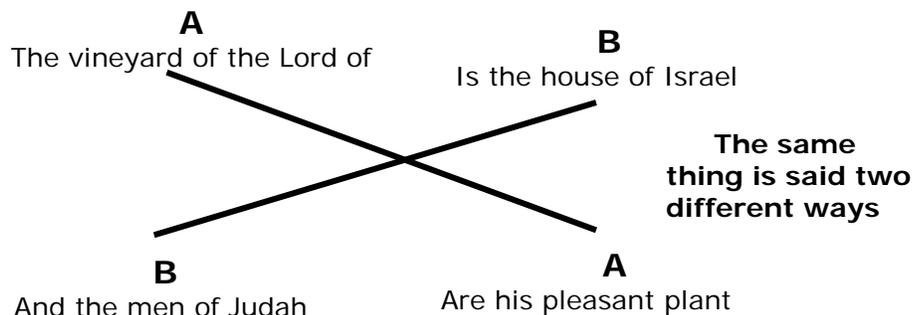
The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
The floods have lifted up their voice;  
The floods lift up their waves.  
The LORD on high *is* mightier  
Than the noise of many waters,  
*Than* the mighty waves of the sea.

**Chiasm.** A certain kind of parallelism is called a *chiasm*, named after the Greek letter chi (c), which looks something like the English letter X. What this means is that there are sets of parallel thoughts, but they are located in different places, not one after the other. It usually presents a contrast and works like this:



For instance, Isaiah 5:7 reads:

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel,  
And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.  
He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;  
For righteousness, but behold, *a cry for help.*



The Book of Revelation is another example. Dr. Kenneth Strand from Andrews University, in a book entitled *The Open Gates of Heaven*, shows how this structure helps understand the book:

Historical series (1:12 – 14:20)  
The church militant  
God works for human salvation  
God warns the wayward  
Eschatological series (15:1 – 21:4)  
God punishes the wayward  
God completes His salvation  
The church triumphant



### Summary

Scripture means just what it says unless there is obvious reason to think otherwise. This does not mean that it always speaks in declarative sentences. The writers use literary devices and sometimes even exaggeration (a “wooden beam in an eye,” for instance) to get their point across. You have to use common sense, and follow the basic rules of grammar and not be overly literalistic.

### Principle Three: What Did It Mean Then and What Does It Mean Now?

The books of the Bible were written within a certain context that includes history, culture, and ways of expressing ideas that were easily understood by the contemporary people, but may have little meaning today.

At the same time, there are always principles, teachings, doctrines, and applications that are timeless and “cultureless.” These need to be identified and applied to any life situation at any point in history.

There are some places in Scripture where it is difficult to find an exact application, and a literal application may either be impossible, impractical, or unacceptable. At the same time, one must be careful not to make an arbitrary decision as to what is not literal that may violate the principle involved.

One way to solve his dilemma is to ask two questions:

1. What did it mean then? By carefully defining and describing what the situation was and identifying the reasons the writer wrote as he did, the principle will often emerge.
2. What does it mean now? Taking the principle and applying it to today, an application to Christian living will emerge, though the actual details of how it is applied may vary.

A teacher of the Bible must be able to authenticate what he or she is teaching, and know the biblical background of whatever the topic is. How do you authenticate biblical information?

### It Is a Four-Step Process

**Step 1:** Find out what the rest of the Bible says on the point being studied. Use a concordance to do this. A concordance lists all the texts in the Bible that use a certain word. Strong's Concordance is a good one and is included with many computerized Bibles.

**Step 2:** Use a Bible encyclopedia, dictionary and/or Bible handbook to track down information about the topic. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* is a good place to

start. The original edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* is available to download free on the Internet. The second edition is available in print, but the original edition is still a valuable source of biblical information.

**Step 3:** Check out what Bible commentaries say. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* is a good choice.

**Step 4:** Look up what Ellen White has to say on the topic and notice carefully from your previous study which point of view she adopts on whatever the issue is. Ellen White does not claim to be a historian or an infallible authority on everything, but her insights are always valuable. She often discusses both basic questions of what did it mean then and what does it mean now. *Be careful, however, that you do not consciously or unconsciously give Ellen White veto power over the Bible.* This issue will be studied in Part 2 of this course.

### How much time is involved?

**Question:** "All this study must take a lot of time. How will I get access to all these books?"

You can prepare to teach most Sabbath School lessons in about two hours. Unit 4 will review some of the basic tools an Adult Sabbath School teacher needs.

### A Case Study from The Book of Jonah

Let's use this four-step process to study some issues in the book of Jonah.

**Step 1:** Find out what the rest of the Bible says. A concordance reveals that there is only one reference to Jonah outside the book of Jonah itself. (2 Kings 14:25). What do we know about Jonah from this text? Look at a map in the back of your Bible and see if you can locate where Jonah lived. Why do you suppose he disliked Assyrians so much?

Is there anything about Jonah in the New Testament? Jonah is mentioned three times by Jesus. Use a concordance to find the texts. Does Jesus accept the book of Jonah as a true historical record, or does he see it as a big fish story? Does he consider what happened to Jonah a miracle?

**Step 2:** Use a Bible encyclopedia, dictionary and/or Bible handbook to track down information about the topic. Notice that the King James Version uses "Jonas," the Greek spelling of his name. You always have to be careful not to miss something as simple as this.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, for instance, has three full pages on Jonah and the Book of Jonah. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* has five pages complete with diagrams and analysis. Looking through *Unger's Bible Handbook*<sup>1</sup> yields not only information, but some interesting teaching tools. For instance, Unger notes that there are five "greats" in Jonah: a great refusal, a great fish, a great city, a great jealousy, and a great God. Jonah, on the other hand, was not a great prophet! Can you imagine the fascinating class presentation you could build around this outline!

Unger also describes Nineveh and even names some of its suburbs. He presents historical evidence for a revival in Nineveh just about the time Jonah was there. These kinds of observations will enhance a teacher's class presentations and fascinate the class members.

Consulting a study Bible such as *The Student Bible* yields the information that at least one historical account exists of a man being swallowed by a sperm whale and living to tell the story. Another insight that will greatly enrich a class presentation.

**Step 3:** Check out what commentaries have to say. For instance, Gerhard Hasel in *Jonah: Messenger of the Eleventh Hour* (Pacific Press Publishing Association) points out that "Jonah" means "dove;" in the Bible a symbol of endearment, purity, gentleness, simplicity, and longing. Jonah hardly lived up to his name. A teacher can do a lot with that piece of information.

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* yields a map and a diagram of the layout of Nineveh that you could use as a PowerPoint® presentation. It also has some interesting information about the “great fish” and an additional note about the size of Nineveh as compared to cities in Palestine.

**Step 4:** Look up what Ellen White has to say on the topic. The Scripture Index in Volume 1 of the *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen White* lists 15 references to Jonah, nearly all of them from Chapter 22 of *Prophets and Kings*. We discover that Ellen White dedicates significant space in this chapter to a plea for evangelism in cities, a viewpoint that usually doesn’t appear in other commentaries. A reference to page 406 of *Desire of Ages* emphasizes the contrast between the reaction of the Ninevites to Jonah’s message and the reaction of the people around Jesus to His message, while a statement in *Great Controversy*, page 403 brings the Jonah syndrome down to the time of the Millerite movement. *Steps to Christ*, page 10 applies Jonah’s characterization of God in Jonah 4:2 as being “slow to anger, and of great kindness” directly to our own experience of acceptance by God.

It becomes apparent that Ellen White’s perspective on Jonah is principally the relationship of people to God and their reaction to His grace in their lives. Marvelous information for a Sabbath School teacher.

### **Summary**

Our journey through these four steps probably takes no more than a couple of hours to complete, yet we have not only gained enough information to firmly authenticate the Book of Jonah, but also several insights that will enhance our teaching.

### **Principle 4: Know The Difference Between Interpretation and Application.**

Interpreting the text means to find out what it actually says. Applying the text means to relate it to everyday Christian living.

All too often in Sabbath School classes the application does not come from the text itself but from the accumulation of ethical principles that we carry around in our heads. These ethical principles may be perfectly valid and correct, but may not be a correct application of the text at the moment we use them in the class.

*Application means relating the text to everyday Christian living.* Unfortunately, in Sabbath School teaching the application all too often takes the form of a single phrase, a moralistic statement beginning with the words “we ought to. . . .” What follows the words “we ought to. . . .” is often a very general statement based on an appeal to duty, but with very few handles to hang on to. In other words, the application is not very practical.

### **An Example of Misguided Application**

This actually happened in a Sabbath School class. The teacher did a good job, and it was an excellent lesson study. Then suddenly the superintendent announced that the class period would be extended 10 minutes because some special music had not arrived.

Something clicked in the teacher’s mind and there was a sudden switch. The teacher, a fine dedicated, faithful Seventh-day Adventist, began going over every point of Adventist lifestyle; Sabbath keeping, diet, dress, tithe paying, entertainment—it all got into the picture. And the teacher really let the class have it! In the teacher’s estimation, there was apparently not a decent Christian in the class.

The class members sunk lower and lower in their seats. It was almost as if one of those enormous presses used to smash old cars into little metal cubes was being lowered on the class members. Someone tried to hold off the onslaught a time or two with some comments, but nothing helped; it just kept coming. When the class finally ended, it seemed like the members couldn’t get out of there fast enough!

What happened here?

- The teacher shifted from interpretation to application based on personal opinion and the accumulation of ethical ideas carried around in their theological worldview.

- The teacher probably saw those extra 10 minutes as an opportunity for a “review” of some principles of Adventism. But it was all at the wrong time and the wrong place. It had nothing to do with the lesson of the day.
- As it came out, it sounded like the teacher assumed, probably without realizing it, that no one in the class was following those ethical standards, and everyone needed continual course correction.

### **How Jesus Used Interpretation and Application**

Jesus’ application of biblical principles was tied to action. For instance, in the case of the woman taken in adultery, Jesus did not refer her to a study of what the Law of Moses said about what she had done. He just said “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8: 11). When a blind man asked to be healed, Jesus did not give him a lecture on his past life that may well have been the cause of the blindness. He simply asked him “Do you believe I am able to do this?” Once the man committed himself by saying “Yes,” Jesus healed him. (Matthew 9: 27-31). When the Pharisees jumped on the disciples for picking some wheat on the Sabbath, Jesus simply referred them back to the Scriptures and asked them an action question, “Haven't you read . . . ” (Matthew 12: 3). When the person we call the “foolish rich man” inquired about eternal life, Jesus simply told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor, an action application of a Biblical principle; either Jehovah is your God or something else is your god (Mark 10: 17).

The following table illustrates some types of application. The “How it Works” column shows how to make an application of a topic being studied in the lesson of the day.

Type of Application	How It Works
Declarative application	A specific Biblical injunction. “Love Your Enemies.” If you have an enemy, how are you going to go about “loving” him or her from now on?
Relational application	Jonah ran away from God. What are you running from? Jonah stopped running. How do you plan to stop running? After he stopped running, Jonah was still unhappy. How do you feel about God in your life at this moment?
Evangelistic application	Jonah had a specific mandate from the Lord to preach a specific message. We have the same mandate (Matt. 28: 18-20; Rev. 14: 6-12). What points in today’s lesson could become “preaching points” or soul winning points?
Case study application	Ellen White tells the story of a man who made his business decisions by tossing a coin in the air. But he always prayed before he tossed the coin. And his business prospered. She, however, was not in favor of this procedure. How do you explain that his business still prospered, and why would Ellen White not approve? (See <i>Selected Messages</i> , vol. 2, pages 325 - 328).
Illustrative application	How many times should we forgive? Jesus answer, “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . .” Then he told a story that illustrated the point (Matt. 18: 21-35).
Ethical application	“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person . . . .” (Matt. 5: 38-42). How do you do that?
Spirit of Prophecy application	A specific application of some Bible text by Ellen White. Make sure that it is what she actually wrote and not what you “think” she wrote, or what you heard “someone say” she wrote.

## Assignment 5

### Do It Yourself

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

Fill in the second column based on the current *Adult Bible Study Guide* you are studying from.

This is a self-graded assignment. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

<b>Type of Application</b>	<b>How It Works</b>
Declarative application	
Relational application	
Evangelistic application	
Case study application	
Illustrative application	
Ethical application	
Spirit of Prophecy application	

## A Case Study of Interpretation and Application

Assume you are studying the book of Jonah in your class and someone brings up the issue of gambling when you study Jonah 1:7 and the casting of lots. He or she mentions the story of the business man Ellen G White tells about in *Selected Messages*, Bk. 2, pages 325 – 328 who made his business decisions by tossing a coin in the air, but always prayed before he tossed the coin. His business prospered. Ellen G White, however, was not in favor of this procedure.

Let's go through the four steps in the process of authenticating biblical information, and use these steps to solve the dilemma of casting lots and flipping coins.

This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. A lot of people, including Sabbath School members, believe in good luck and bad luck, that "fate" has decreed their destiny, etc. Someone may be visiting your class who believes in the intervention of ancestors who determine what happens to them, etc.

This, in turn, leads to Adventist *Fundamental Belief* No. 11: "By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us . . . ."

Are we dealing with evil spirits who direct how the lots fall or determine whether the coin is heads or tails?

**1. Find out what the rest of the Bible has to say.** A concordance reveals nine instances in the Bible where this method of casting lots was used: (1) It was used on the Day of Atonement in the sanctuary service to decide which goat was the Lord's and which was Azazel, (2) it was used to divide up Palestine among the 12 tribes, (3) to identify Achan as the guilty party at the battle of Jericho, (4) by Haman to decide the day the Jews would be killed in the time of Esther, (5) to decide which tasks different Levite families would carry out in the Temple during the time of Nehemiah, (6) as a poetic decision-making process in Joel, (7) by the Roman soldiers to decide who would get Jesus' robe, (8) by the disciples in the choosing of Matthias, and (9) in the experience involving Jonah.

**2. Look it up in a Bible encyclopedia, dictionary, or handbook.** The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* is of the opinion that this is a valid method if and when the Lord specifically tells people to use it. If He does not, then we ought to use the intelligence He has given us to make decisions, relying on prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (p. 681). *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* points out that after the choosing of Matthias, there is no record that this method was used again. Christians began to depend primarily on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This probably gives us the clue to a solution. While the common custom of casting lots may have been used on occasion by the Lord to indicate His will, once the promise that "When he (the Holy Spirit) comes he will guide you into all truth" (John 16: 13) was fulfilled, chance methods such as casting lots disappeared from the menu of Christian decision-making processes.

**3. Check out what commentaries have to say.** A search in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* refers us to Ezekiel 21:21 ("For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver"), which in turn refers us to an interesting statement by Ellen G White about some unique practices in the early Seventh-day Adventist church and a general discussion about chance methods.

**4. How does Ellen White solve the problem?** In her comments about this situation Ellen White endorses the idea that today it is human intelligence, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, that is to be used in making decisions, not chance methods. The specific experience

here is about a church board that was electing officers by casting lots. They thought they were following a biblical principle. Ellen White's comment was:

I have no faith in casting lots. We have in the Bible a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in regard to all church duties. . . . I would say to the members of the church in\_\_\_\_\_, 'Read your Bibles with much prayer. Do not try to humble others, but humble yourselves before God, and deal gently with one another. To cast lots for the officers of the church is not in God's order. Let men of responsibility be called upon to select the officers of the church.'— *Selected Messages*, Bk. 2, p. 328.

The people of God can come to a correct understanding of their duty only through sincere prayer and earnest seeking for the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. When they seek aright for instruction concerning their course of action, these strange and unreliable methods will not be accepted by them. They will then be saved from haphazard work and from the confusion that is ever the result of depending on human devisings. . . *Selected Messages*, Bk. 2, page 325.

So we can conclude that the principle here is that God guides His people in making decisions. He has used different methods down through history, at times allowing His people to use commonly understood methods such as casting lots. Today, guidance comes through using our intelligence and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When some early Adventists became overly literal in their interpretation of the Bible, the Lord corrected them through the offices of the gift of prophecy.

## Assignment 6

### How Well Have You Mastered the Material in This Unit?

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This is a self-graded assignment. When you finish this assignment, check back in your Study Guide to see how you did. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

1. What are the four principles of Biblical interpretation studied in this Unit?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
2. What does the word "hermeneutics" mean?
3. How does the Seventh-day Adventist church understand the meaning of infallible as it is applied to the Bible?
4. What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis?
5. Articulate in your own words the meaning of the phrase "the analogy of faith."
6. What does it mean to use the context in interpreting the Bible?
7. Explain the difference between interpretation and application

## UNIT 4

### Tools for Bible Study and Teaching

The purpose of this Unit is to give the Sabbath School teacher information about some tools for Bible study and show how to use these tools.

The Bible is the principle tool in the hands of Christians to do the work of the Kingdom. Many practicing Christians, however, though they may have what is often called "a working

knowledge" of the Bible, are not familiar with some of the basic tools that enhance Bible study and make Bible teaching more effective.

As we have learned in the previous Units, the Bible must be interpreted. It is true that it is to be taken literally unless it is clearly symbolic, but the Bible also has historical details, scientific implications, biographies, chronologies, etc. The tools used for Bible study help the teacher understand these details and better able to apply Biblical principles in his or her teaching.

This Unit will study seven kinds of tools:

1. General tools for Bible Study
2. Bible Introductions
3. Tools for learning Bible history
4. Tools for studying special Bible topics
5. Tools for studying theology
6. Tools for learning Bible study methods
7. A special system for personal study

When you complete this Unit, you should:

1. Be familiar with the basic tools for Bible study.
2. Be able to outline and put into action a study plan for intellectual and spiritual benefit.
3. Be able to articulate a number of specific Bible study tools you can use in your personal study and in your Sabbath school class.<sup>1</sup>

### **General Tools for Bible Study**

General tools for Bible study are those that deal specifically with the Bible itself. If you plan to dedicate a significant part of your time to a teaching ministry, they are invaluable.

**Concordances.** A concordance lists all the words in the Bible and the texts where they are used. You can get concordances in book form or computerized. Most computer Bibles include Strong's numbering. Clicking on these numbers takes you to Hebrew and Greek dictionaries that are valuable study tools.

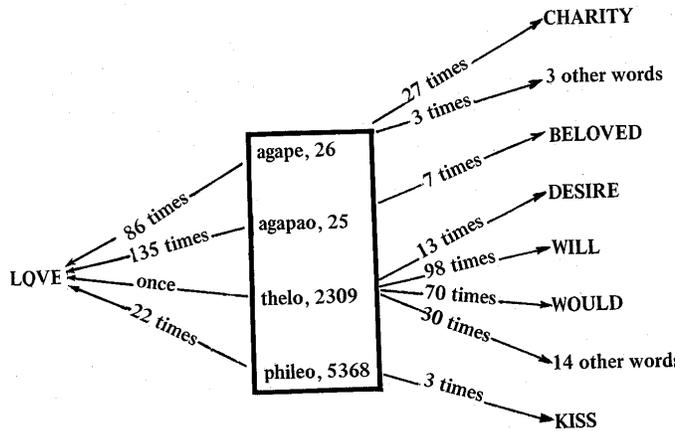
For instance, if you look up Daniel 8:14 you will find the reference number 6944. Click on this number (or look it up in the back of the print edition) and it will take you to the Hebrew word "*quodesh*." There you find an explanation of what the word means. This reference will then take you to Strong's number 6942 which will outline the grammatical forms of the word.

Another valuable type of concordance is a book called *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library). This book lists every use of a Greek word and how it is translated into English in the King James Version. The book has an index of English words so you can find them in the concordance.

Here's an example of four Greek words translated as "love" in English. Look up each Greek word and notice what it means and how it is used. You can make a diagram like this for any word you may be studying. This knowledge is of real help in developing teaching plans for Sabbath School classes.

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<sup>1</sup>An excellent source of information, though somewhat technical, is Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House).



**Bible dictionaries.** Bible dictionaries discuss specific topics, places, people, and events. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* is very accurate and excellent tool.

**Bible encyclopedias.** Bible encyclopedias are similar to Bible dictionaries, but are much more detailed and yield much more information. One excellent set is the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, 4 vol., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company). The original edition, still an excellent tool, is available free on the Internet. There are also specialized encyclopedias such as Madelein S. and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Bible Life* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978). These deal with how people lived, what kind of houses they had, customs of the times, etc.

**Bible handbooks.** Bible handbooks are shorter versions of dictionaries and encyclopedias, but very valuable. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, revised and updated edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984) is a good example. Books in this category usually contain a lot of maps, colored pictures, and illustrations from archeological discoveries.

**Bible commentaries.** Commentaries help with exegesis. There are two kinds of commentaries; those written by one person, and those written by a group of people. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* is the work of many authors and is an indispensable tool for Sabbath School teachers. There are seven volumes of commentaries, a Bible Dictionary and a two-volume Seventh-day Adventist encyclopedia (soon to be available online) giving all kinds of information about the Seventh-day Adventist church. The set also includes the *Seventh-day Adventist Student's Source Book*, filled with accurate quotations about all kinds of historical subjects, and a volume that compiles the Ellen G White quotations pertaining to each book of the Bible.

### Bible introductions

Books with "Bible Introductions" titles typically go through each book of the Bible and give outlines, historical background, and insights into the various books. As an example, R. K. Harrison's, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), discusses the development of Old Testament study, ancient Near Eastern chronology, the text and canon of the Old Testament, Old Testament history, religion, and theology, and each book of the Bible — over 1300 pages in all.

A Sabbath School teacher ought to have at least one Old Testament Introduction and one New Testament Introduction at his or her disposal.

### Tools for Biblical History, Archeology, and Chronology

A Sabbath School teacher needs to know something about the history of the Bible and the Bible lands. There are many books on this subject. Many of these are available online through Amazon, Christian Book Distributors (<https://www.christianbook.com>) and other online book providers.

Biblical chronology and archeology fall into this category. It is of interest that a large number of evangelical scholars follow the chronological scheme worked out by a Seventh-day Adventist, Dr. Edwin R. Thiele. His work is available in a book entitled *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1983). There is also an abridged edition entitled *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

Both volume yield very technical information, but chronological information is important because it verifies the validity of many biblical events. It is valuable for Seventh-day Adventists because of our interpretation of prophetic time periods in the Bible.

For instance, the book *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, second edition revised by S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970) was instrumental in verifying the date 457 A.D. as the beginning date of the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8. Sabbath School teachers will do well to read books like this and become well versed in their contents.

### **Special topics**

Special Bible topics are things like plants and animals in the Bible, forms of government, food, etc. Find a book about Bible manners and customs and it will usually tell about these special things. One excellent book in this category is James I. Packer (ed.), *The Bible Almanac* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980). It has chapters about gems and minerals, tools and implements, money and economics, etc. and is a gold mine of information for a Sabbath School teacher.

The "All" series of books by Herbert Lockyer (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) is an excellent study tool. Each title starts with "All the . . ." and the series includes books on the doctrines of the Bible, kings and queens, prayers, Messianic prophecies, miracles, promises, men, women, children, trades and occupations, apostles, books and chapters, Divine names and titles, teachings of Jesus, and Last Words of Saints and Sinners. The series is packed with helpful information for Sabbath School teachers.

### **Tools for Studying Theology**

Theology is the study of the doctrines of the Bible. A Sabbath School teacher needs some books on theology at his or her disposal. An excellent of book on theology from an evangelical (conservative) point of view is Walter Elwell, ed., *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984). There are some things in this volume that Seventh-day Adventists do not agree with, and it must be read carefully. Nevertheless, it contains a lot of information of value to a Sabbath School teacher.

There are three excellent books on Seventh-day Adventist theology that every Sabbath School teacher should be familiar with:

1. George W. Reid, General Editor, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000).
2. T. H. Jemison, *Christian Beliefs* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1959). This is an older book, but still valuable.
3. Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD, 2005). An exposition of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

### **Specific Adventist doctrines**

The following books on specific Adventist doctrines are helpful for a Sabbath School teacher:

**Prophecy:** V. Norskov Olsen, ed., *The Advent Hope in Scripture and History*. (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987).

**The Sabbath:** Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*. (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982).

**The Non-Immortality of the Soul:** Two books are especially helpful on this subject:

1. Uriah Smith, *Here and Hereafter*. (Republished by Amazing Facts).
2. Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*. (Houston, TX.: Providential Press, 1982). The author is not a Seventh-day Adventist, but he was influenced by Seventh-day Adventists in accepting conditional immortality. An excellent book.

**The Sanctuary and 1844.** There are many books published on this subject. One of the most complete is Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*. (Silver Spring, MD.: Biblical Research Committee. A full edition and an abridged edition are available.

### **Tools for learning and using Bible study methods**

There are many ways of studying the Bible. The most common is devotional reading. This method, however, is not the most adequate for preparing to teach a Sabbath School lesson.

A Sabbath School teacher must prepare in a way in which the students will learn, and there are many ways to teach the Bible. The most common is to give a lecture. Sometime this method is appropriate, but it is not the primary method that should be used. If you use one or more of the following method frameworks for studying a lesson, the class presentation will often follow the same framework. As a result, the class will become much more interesting and meaningful.

### **The inductive method**

This method uses a system of studying language units, constructing outlines and charts, interpreting symbols, and literary devices, and finally constructing a pattern that indicates the outcome of the analogy of faith for a passage of Scripture. For an excellent book on how to do this, see Leo Van Dolson, *How to Get the Most Out of Bible Study* (Pacific Press Publishing Association). Go to [thinkonitbibledevotions.com](http://thinkonitbibledevotions.com) and click on Bible Studies for an example of inductive Bible study. This is not an Adventist website, but the information is excellent.

### **The biographical method**

People's lives always interest other people. Ellen G White highly recommends this method:

As an educator no part of the Bible is of greater value than are its biographies. These biographies differ from all others in that they are absolutely true to life. It is impossible for any finite mind to interpret rightly, in all things, the workings of another. None but He who reads the heart, who discerns the secret springs of motive and action, can with absolute truth delineate character, or give a faithful picture of a human life. In God's word alone is found such delineation. — *Education*, p. 14

## Reading 5

- *Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.*

### Some Examples of Bible Biography Teaching Ideas

Study System	Definition	Example
Character analysis	An analysis of outstanding character traits. Example: Samson	"Sampson – A Walking Contradiction" 1. His virtues 2. His vices
Career analysis	Look at the main events or stages of a person's life. Example: Moses	1. Forty years in the Egyptian court 2. Forty years in the Midian desert 3. Forty years in the wilderness with Israel
Activity analysis	This system deals with the major activities of a Bible character. Example: Barnabas	1. Barnabas befriends Paul 2. Barnabas speaks for the Gentiles 3. Barnabas rescues Paul from obscurity 4. Barnabas saves Mark
Place analysis	Sometimes places figure prominently in a person's life. Example: Three mountains in the life of Moses.	1. The mountain of revelation – Sinai 2. The mountain of intercession – Mt. Rephidim 3. The mountain of disappointment – Pisgah & Nebo
Crisis analysis	Crises in a person's life reveal who the person really is. Example - Esther	1. The racial crisis 2. The religious crisis 3. The personal crisis
Relationship analysis	This system considers the relationships of the Bible character to other people. Example: Eve	1. Her relationship to Adam 2. Her relationship to her children 3. Her relationship to the human race 4. Her relationship to God
Contribution analysis	What particular contribution has a Bible character made? Example: Moses	1. His contribution to literature 2. His contribution to law 3. His contribution to religion
Reward analysis	This analysis reveals the rewards that come to a person as a result of his or her stand for God. Example: Ruth	1. Refuge under the wings of God 2. Rest from widowhood and poverty 3. Redemption by Boaz 4. Renown in Messianic line and a book with her name
Group analysis	You might deal with a group of biblical people. Example: "Three typical church members"	1. Gaius: the beloved disciple 2. Diotrephes: the domineering disciple 3. Demetrius: the ideal disciple

### The Historical Method

This method studies the historical details surrounding a Bible book or event. It includes studying the chronology of an event, archeological evidence, places, causes, results, people involved, etc. Knowing these kinds of details can greatly enhance your teaching.

### **The Literary Study Method**

This is the type of study that looks at the literary devices we studied previously.

For instance, many people use the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16: 19-31 to prove the immortality of the soul. But this is a story Jesus told, not a doctrinal explanation. When you look for the point of the story, it is entirely different than if you see these verses as doctrinal exposition. Jesus used a popular legend containing untrue ideas to teach a true lesson. He did this because He was simply using a teaching method that went from the known to the unknown to get His point across.

### **The Theological Method**

The theological method studies a Bible topic or a doctrine systematically. It is the process of searching through the entire Bible to compile, compare, and organize doctrinal statements and teachings.

For instance, if you open to the Table of Contents of any book on systematic theology, you will find a list something like this:

1. The Doctrine of God
2. The Doctrine of Man
3. The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ
4. Etc.

### **The Geographical Method**

The geographical method studies places and their relation to events. For instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it says that the traveler was going *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10: 30). Why did he go "down" and not "up?" Looking at a map of Palestine and drawing a simple side view of the land can add some interesting detail to the presentation of the lesson. Many prophetic symbols, such as the "early" and "latter" rain, are taken from the agricultural cycle of Palestine. Knowing this can make your teaching more interesting and effective.

### **The Sociological Method**

The sociological method studies systems of social organization, governments, military organization, economic systems, family organization, etc. This kind of study can bring out fascinating details that enhance learning.

For instance, a careful study of an economic system called "levirate marriage" will greatly enhance understanding the Book of Ruth. The Latin word *levir* means brother-in-law, and you find how that fits in Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

In the book of Ruth, Ruth, a non-Israelite, wasn't sure what was going on, but Naomi knew exactly what she was doing. Once Boaz got the unspoken message, he also knew what Naomi was up to.

You and I have not been part of such a system, so we have to dig out the information and help class members understand it. Then the Book of Ruth comes alive with applications that fit our sociological patterns and understandings. What is nice in this story is that even though Boaz knew he was dealing with economics, he also really fell in love with Ruth. That's an interesting item to enhance a Sabbath School class.

### **The Political Method**

The political method seeks to investigate matters relating to the management of governmental affairs of the nations mentioned in the Bible. This includes types of government, their philosophies, leaders, history, functions, wars, etc. The Book of Daniel and the history surrounding it is an example.

### **The Cultural Method**

The cultural method studies the manners and customs of Bible times. It also includes such things as music, art, architecture, literature, worldview, and language. Distinguishing

between Biblical principles and cultural mores is one of the more complicated tasks a Bible teacher has. It is all too easy to read our day and its culture into Bible times instead of the reverse process.

### **The Psychological Method**

The psychological method deals with human personality. It is related to the biographical method, except that it looks more closely at why people act the way they do, including feelings, emotions, motivation, etc.

An example would be the feelings between David and Saul, and Saul's mental illness. Another example would be a study of how Paul's Christian experience was affected by his sufferings during his ministry. A third example would be Elijah's emotional state after the incident on Mt. Cannel.

### **The Devotional Method**

The devotional study method focuses on the teacher's own spiritual enrichment. One way to do this is to develop a marking system in the margin beside portions of Scripture that "speak" to you. You can hand out a portion of Scripture from the lesson you are teaching and have the class members do this as part of the learning experience of the day, or they can mark it in their personal Bibles.

\* indicates a thought that is new to you.

# indicates something that you feel really helps you at the moment.

+ indicates a duty to perform.

> indicates a promise you can claim.

### **A Study System for Sabbath School Teachers**

A Sabbath School teacher needs to study on a regular basis to keep up to date and to have a fund of knowledge on which to draw. The following study system is one idea that will continually build your knowledge base, and give you the opportunity to build up a data bank of materials that will make your teaching easier and more productive.

Any topic one wishes to study requires four things: reading, close study and research, organization into usable form, and time for meditation and assimilation.

By setting up a three-year study cycle, all of these elements can be included. This is assuming, of course, that you as a Sabbath School teacher are going to do more than a "Friday Night Flurry" of preparation to teach. There is no magic remedy for that malady.

The system outlined here takes a topic or a Bible book and organizes it into a three-year study program. Once you start on this program, you will be amazed at how fast your data bank of knowledge grows. If you follow the plan on a regular basis, you will be ready in advance for whatever Sabbath School lesson topics appear from quarter to quarter. Here is how it works:

**Year One: Reading and assimilation.** Choose a topic and read some books about it. Or choose a book of the Bible, read it all year, and read some commentaries or books about it. Take notes, make outlines and write out questions that come to mind. Underline. Use the devotional method if you are studying a book of the Bible. Read what Ellen White says about the topic or book. Make some notes in a notebook or develop another kind of filing system. Do research on the Internet. By the time the year is over, your files will be bulging with useful information.

**Year Two: Systematic study.** This year take all the material you have collected and do an in-depth study of the topic or Bible book. Make outlines and find the answers to questions. Look up the details. If there are two or more sides to a question, become literate about the issues involved. By the time year two is up, you will have pretty well mastered the topic or Bible book.

While you are doing this, you are also launching a new "Year One" reading cycle on another topic or Bible book.

**Year Three: Usable format.** Now you are ready to organize what you have learned into teaching format. Make some lesson plans. If you are a lay preacher, organize sermon outlines. Develop Bible studies.

At the same time, you will be doing a "Year One" and "Year Two." Each on a new topic or Bible book.

### **Building Up Your Data Bank of Knowledge**

By the time you complete the first three-year cycle, you will be well on your way. From then on you will always be (1) reading on one subject, (2) studying in detail another, and (3) putting into usable teaching format yet another.

Does this take a lot of study time? It all depends how much you want to put into it. You can make this system work in as little as fifteen minutes a day. *The advantage is that you are studying systematically.* By doing so over using a three-year cycle, you have time to absorb the topic and make it part of your mental data bank. You will be amazed at how much this helps.

## UNIT 5

### How to Interpret the Writings of Ellen G White

#### The Gift of Prophecy and Its Role in the Life of the Church

The purpose of this Unit is to study and understand the place the gift of prophecy occupies in the Seventh-day Adventist church and in the life of the individual member.

The Bible is the principle tool in the hands of Christians to do the work of the Kingdom. The Bible, however, came to humanity through the gift of prophecy. Many people do not really understand the nature of the gift of prophecy, or its authority and role in the life of the individual Christian and the corporate church body.

This Unit will provide you with a knowledge of that background, primarily as the gift was manifested through the person of Ellen G White and her writings.

This Unit will study four topics:

1. What the gift of prophecy is.
2. How the gift of prophecy functions.
3. The role it plays in the life of the church.
4. The authority of the gift of prophecy.

This study does not attempt to directly validate the ministry of Ellen G White, nor is it a defense of her ministry. There are many books and documents that do that. Our purpose here is to learn how to correctly interpret and use the writings of Ellen G White as they relate to the Scriptures, the corporate church, and the individual members.

Three books are especially helpful. All three are available online at <http://www.whiteestate.org>

1. Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998).
2. Juan Carlos Viera, *The Voice of the Spirit* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998).
3. T. Housel Jamison, *A Prophet Among You* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1955). This is an older book but still valuable.

When you complete this Unit, you should be able to:

1. Articulate either verbally or in writing what the gift of prophecy is.
2. Articulate either verbally or in writing how the gift of prophecy functions.
3. Explain the relationship between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the gift of prophecy as manifested in the person of Ellen G White.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that the gift of prophecy was given to Ellen G White as a life-long gift for the benefit of the church. We have followed the wording of Rev. 19:10 and termed this ministry and the writings that have resulted from it the "Spirit of Prophecy."

There are two fundamental beliefs dealing with this issue. Fundamental Belief No. 17 deals with spiritual gifts in general. Fundamental Belief No. 18 specifies the gift of prophecy:

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all

teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)

### **The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture**

As we learned previously, Christianity is a revealed religion. It did not originate because someone set out to start a new religion. It did not begin because someone was dissatisfied with the church to which he or she belonged. Rather, God revealed Himself to humanity, and He has chosen to do so through prophets: "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The authors of the Bible, who, except for Luke and Jude, were all prophets or apostles, acted as God's agents and recorded for all people and all time what the apostle Paul calls "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2 KJV).

What makes a person a prophet is God's call, and the person's response to that call. As we will see, a person may be called to the office of prophet, a lifelong ministry, or they may be called upon to "prophecy;" be a spokesperson for God, at a given moment, even though this may happen only once in an entire lifetime.

The gift of prophecy is mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with the calling of the various prophets. There are also four women in the Old Testament who are specifically called prophetesses; Miriam, Moses' sister (Exodus 15:20), Deborah, one of the judges (Judges 4:4), Huldah, the wife of a Temple employee in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 34:22), and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3).

In the New Testament it is applied to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:9), his father Zechariah (Luke 1:67), Anna (Luke 2:36), Caiaphas, the High Priest (John 11:51), some disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:6), the daughters of Phillip the evangelist (Acts 21:9), Agabus and some others in Antioch (Acts 11:28; 21:10), another group in Antioch that included Paul (Acts 13:1), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and Jesus himself.

The Lord gives some specific admonitions regarding the gift of prophecy.

- It is not to be treated with contempt (1 Thessalonians 5:20).
- It is to be tested (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Whoever receives a prophet because they are a prophet gets a prophet's reward (Matthew 10:41).
- "Have faith in his prophets and you will be successful" (2 Chronicles 20:20).

### **The Prophetic Process**

The word "prophet" means "one who speaks forth God's message." The key exposition of how the prophetic system works is found in Deuteronomy 18:14-21. The process of the communication system is outlined in Revelation 1: 1-3.

The way God communicates is often through dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6).

When we speak of the sources of Paul's theology, it must not be forgotten that God dealt with him in highly personal and subjective ways. God used Paul's openness to visions and dreams to enable him to clarify messages, receive insights, and find answers to difficult problems. Paul has been characterized by his most severe critics as one who was easily influenced by his emotions and susceptible to all kinds of extrasensory messages. But for Paul it was no weakness or liability to be taught by spiritual communication. It was his purest guidance and source of strength. The references to divinely given information are recorded in such a matter-of-fact way that we can only

assume that visions and dreams were accepted as sources of authority in Paul's day.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible does not give a specific definition of the gift of prophecy, and many have been devised. One reason it is hard to choose among the many definitions available is that most of them reflect a theological point of view rather than a description of the gift itself. The following definition seems to be an adequate description of the gift of prophecy.

The gift of prophecy is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message from God to His people through a divinely-anointed utterance.<sup>2</sup>

To whom, why, and when this happens is up to the Holy Spirit. He is the initiator, assigner, and enabler of the gift of prophecy.

### **The Permanence of the Gift of Prophecy**

There are many churches that believe that the gift of prophecy ended either at the death of the last apostle, or when the canon of Scripture closed. For instance, William McRae writes:

Prior to the availability and completion of the New Testament, this gift must have been indispensable. As there is no further revelation given today, since the canon of Scripture is completed, the gift is no longer present with us, nor has it been present since the days of the early church.<sup>3</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist church believes, and has always believed, that the gift of prophecy, along with other spiritual gifts, are present and functioning in any age, including today's world.

### **The Adventist Argument for the Permanence of the Gift of Prophecy**

The Seventh-day Adventist argument for the permanence of the gift of prophecy is that:

1. The closing of the canon did not mark the cessation of Heaven's communication with humankind.
2. The Scriptures themselves reveal the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.
3. "Those that reject the work of the Spirit of God under the plea that the Scriptures are sufficient do deny and reject all that part of the Bible which reveals the office and work of the Holy Spirit." (J. N. Andrews, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 15, 1870).
4. The gift of prophecy is specifically connected with the closing work of the gospel era. Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 19:10; Joel 2:28-32.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology & Mission Practice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983) pp. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, (Regal Books, 1979) p. 228.

<sup>3</sup>*The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>A good source of information on this topic is A. G. Daniels, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy*. Daniels traces instances of the manifestation of the gift of prophecy throughout the history of the Christian church. See also chapter 18 in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

## How The gift of prophecy functions

There are two broad categories of prophetic function:

1. *Classical Prophecy*. Classical prophecy refers to the function of a prophet that primarily involves, in the words of 2 Timothy 3:16, teaching, rebuking, and correcting and training in righteousness. In this sense the messages of the prophets are directed toward the people of God and the inner workings of the church.
2. *Predictive Prophecy*. Predictive prophecy, such as in the books of Daniel and Revelation is also the work of some prophets, but not all. Actually, most prophets are classical. The predictive content of their works is relatively minor.

The words “prophet” and “prophecy,” however, usually build predictive pictures in people’s minds. So, the common stereotype of a prophet is that of someone who predicts the future. Prophets, however, spend most of their time giving counsel or edifying the church.

How does Ellen G White fit these categories? Ellen G White functions most of the time as a classical prophet. Her testimonies, for instance, are mostly letters sent to individuals or groups, much like the “epistles” (letters) of Paul. There are of course, predictive elements in Ellen G White’s writings, but they are few as compared to the other functions of her works.

I shall warn and counsel and reprove and encourage as the Spirit of God dictates, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. My duty is not to please myself but to do the will of my heavenly Father, who has given me my work. — *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 232

Ellen G White did not call herself a prophetess. She called herself a “messenger,” but she did not deny her prophetic role.

To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has covered so many lines that I cannot call myself other than a messenger, sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people, and to take up work in any line that He points out. — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 34.

## The Authority of the Gift of Prophecy

When you have a contemporary (as compared to Bible times) person with the gift of prophecy, what is the relationship between their authority and the authority of Scripture? This is a key question and needs to be carefully considered.

## No Degrees of the Gift of Prophecy

There is no qualitative difference between the inspiration of the Bible prophets and the inspiration of anyone else with the gift of prophecy. A prophet is a prophet, at whatever point in history they may live. It is the same God and the same Holy Spirit that gives the gift of prophecy to whomever is chosen.

The difference lies in the authority of the canonical Scriptures as opposed to any other prophetic revelation, whether written or oral. *The canonical Scriptures are the proving ground over against which all other revelations must be tested and measured.* The analogy of faith resides in the Scripture. It is over against the Scriptures that any contradictions, restatements, broader understandings, or whatever, must be worked out and measured. This was Ellen G White’s view of her own writings.

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. . . . Isaiah declares, ‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is

because there is no light in them' (Isa. 8:20). — *The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light. — *Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903.

"While she was endowed with the gift of prophecy, she consistently directed her listeners to the messages of the prophets and apostles of old. This was her practice throughout her lifetime."<sup>5</sup>

Ellen G White was determined on this point: "If the Testimonies speak not according to this word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial (Satan) cannot be united." — *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 691.

### **Problems About Authority**

The problems that arise over the authority of the ministry of Ellen G White fall into three categories:

1. The issue of verbal inspiration.
2. Misunderstandings over the sources of prophetic information.
3. Misstatements by overzealous people that subsequently become part of "tradition" in Seventh-day Adventist churches.

### **Verbal Inspiration**

Some of the same people who accepted this view of the inspiration of the Bible carried it over to the writings of Ellen G White. In Adventist history, it erupted into a battle around 1909 over a relatively insignificant point of prophetic interpretation, the meaning of the "daily" in Daniel 8. The issue was over whether Uriah Smith or O.R.L. Crosier had the correct viewpoint.<sup>6</sup>

W. W. Prescott, a careful scholar, but with a tendency, as Ellen G White said to him, "of making a mountain out of a molehill" (Letter 224, 1908), was on one side, and Stephen Haskell was the leader on the other side.

Haskell got hold of an old 1843 prophetic chart that upheld his view of the daily. This is where the verbal inspiration problem came in.

Haskell claimed that Ellen G White, by endorsing that prophetic chart in *Early Writings*, pp. 74-76, had endorsed his view; and if any other view were accepted it would undermine confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy, because it would violate the principle of verbal inspiration, since "inspiration" cannot change its viewpoint. Haskell said point blank; "If Sister White says that she does not mean what she said when she said what she did on the 'daily,' then I will say no more"<sup>7</sup>

The opposition group said that time and context had to be taken into consideration and that there was a perfectly logical explanation to what she had written in *Early Writings*.

All this time Ellen G White was telling both sides that she had no direct revelation from the Lord on either side of the question and that all the agitation over a minor issue was causing far more trouble than it was worth.

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<sup>5</sup>D. A. Delafield, *Ellen G. White in Europe 1885-1887* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975) p. 240.

<sup>6</sup>If you are interested in reading further about this debate, see the article "The Daily" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*.

<sup>7</sup>See Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, vol. 6. p. 253.

What is interesting here is that the very person who originally brought in the verbal inspiration view, W. W. Prescott, switches sides and reaps the results of his earlier view having been accepted by Stephen Haskell and others.

Overall, what happened is that the verbal inspiration view became the “unofficial perception,” almost an Adventist tradition, held by a significant number of Seventh-day Adventists, despite official statements to the contrary, even statements by Ellen G White herself.

Another issue that caused considerable agitation over the verbal inspiration idea was a new edition of *Great Controversy* in 1911. Ever since 1888 this book had been reprinted many times from the same printing plates. That’s 23 years using one set of plates. In 1907, the plates were repaired, but by 1910 it was obvious new plates were needed. As the project developed, Ellen G White herself made the following suggestion:

When I learned that *Great Controversy* must be reset, I determined that we would have everything closely examined, to see if the truths it contained were stated in the very best manner, to convince those not of our faith that the Lord had guided and sustained me in the writing of its pages. — Letter 56, 1911.

You can read the full story of how the process developed in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, chapter 23.

Here is an interesting highlight, however. As the work of checking out sources of quotations progressed and time went by, the rumor mill started up. As Arthur White describes it in the words of W. C. White:

Shortly after we sent word to the Pacific Press to delay electrotyping [making the printing plates], one of the workers in the type foundry visited the school [Pacific Union College], and soon questions and reports were as plentiful on the hillside and in the valley as quails in August.

Questions and suppositions and remarks come to Mother from all quarters, and she will continue to be perplexed by them until the work is done. — Ibid, p.104.

What did these questions involve? Primarily, it seems which view of the “daily” was going to get into the new edition. As it turned out, the “daily” is not even mentioned in *Great Controversy*.

It was in this context that an “unwritten tradition” developed in the Seventh-day Adventist church that persists even today. Adventist historian R. W. Schwarz describes it well:

In the years following Ellen G White’s death veneration for her work and her writings increased among many Seventh-day Adventists. Perhaps it was because her ministry was so recent or her words in language they could better understand or that she was uniquely and exclusively ‘one of them.’ Whatever the reasons, the situation was such by 1919 that A. G. Daniells could frankly admit: ‘I am sure there has been advocated an idea of infallibility in sister White and verbal inspiration in the testimonies that has led people to expect too much and to make too great claims, and so we have gotten into difficulty.’ O. A. Tait agreed; he remembered that there seemed to be a higher-than-normal percentage of apostasies among people who promoted such extreme views. ‘If a man does not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, he is still in good standing; but if he says he does not believe in the verbal inspiration of the testimonies, he is discounted right away,’ Prescott

complained, 'I think this is an unhealthy situation. It puts the Spirit of Prophecy above the Bible.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Inspired Writers Use Sources**

Misunderstandings have arisen over the use of sources in inspired writings. Those who hold to verbal inspiration find it difficult to accept that a prophet may use any existing sources. Those who accept Ellen G White's view of dynamic inspiration have an easier time, but still struggle with how a prophet evaluates sources, and how accurate those sources are historically, scientifically, or even morally and sociologically.

The facts are that inspired writers have always used sources. The Scriptures yield the examples of Luke and Paul. Paul's information about the situation in the Corinthian church came from a letter sent by the household of Cloe (1 Corinthians 1:11). Luke specifically tells us that he did a careful investigation, and as a result wrote an "orderly account" (Luke 1:1-4).<sup>9</sup>

The resetting of the *Great Controversy* plates gave rise, as we have seen, to a discussion of Ellen G White's use of sources. Ellen G White's own explanation is that she received in vision "flashlight pictures" of historical events and used historians as sources of dates, events, and to fill in the details.<sup>10</sup>

Her son W. C. White, gave this explanation:

Mother has never claimed to be authority on history. The things which she has written out, are descriptions of flashlight pictures and other representations given her regarding the actions of men, and the influence of these actions upon the work of God for the salvation of men, with views of past, present, and future history in its relation to this work. In connection with the writing out of these views, she has made use of good and clear historical statements to help make plain to the reader the things which she is endeavoring to present. When I was a mere boy, I heard her read D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation* to my father. She read to him a large part, if not the whole, of the five volumes. She has read other histories of the Reformation. This has helped her to locate and describe many of the events and the movements presented to her in vision. This is somewhat similar to the way in which the study of the Bible helps her to locate and describe the many figurative representations given to her regarding the development of the great controversy in our day between truth and error. (Statement made by W. C. White before the General Conference Council, Oct. 30, 1911. See *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 437).

### **Misunderstandings That Become Traditions**

This is an area of many misunderstandings. The misunderstandings can be categorized under four headings:

1. The misunderstanding that everyone must interpret all texts and statements the same.
2. Misunderstandings leading to the concept of an inflexible prophet.
3. The misunderstanding of mixing up Ellen G White statements with those of others and crediting inspiration to all.

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<sup>8</sup>*Light Bearers To The Remnant*, (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979) p. 418.

<sup>9</sup>For a detailed explanation of this issue, see George Rice, *Luke, A Plagiarist?* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1983).

<sup>10</sup>See Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years*, (chapter 24).

#### 4. The propagation of apocryphal statements.

##### **Unity of Interpretation Misunderstanding**

This is the misunderstanding that everyone must interpret all texts and statements the same. This is most easily answered in the words of Ellen G White herself:

One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ's school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls. — *Manuscript Releases*, Volume 11, "Love the Need of the Church," p. 266.

Christ prayed that His disciples might be one, even as He and His Father are one. In what does this unity consist? That oneness does not consist in everyone having the same disposition, the very same temperament, that makes all run in the very same channel. All do not possess the same degree of intelligence. All have not the same experience. In a church there are different gifts and varied experiences. In temporal matters there is a great variety of ways of management, and yet none of these variations in manner of labor, in exercise of gifts, need to create dissension and discord and disunion. One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture is especially appreciated by him because he has seen it in a certain striking light; another sees another portion as very important; and thus one and another presents the very points to the people that appear of highest value. This is all in the order of God. One man blunders in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, but shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same shade of light. — *Manuscript Releases* Volume 15, "Biblical Counsel on Solving Church Difficulties," p. 149.

##### **The Inflexible Prophet Misunderstanding**

This view assumes that for almost any subject you can find an absolute answer in the writings of Ellen G White.

This then becomes the so-called "blueprint." One outcome of this is the Adventist tendency to back up everything that is written or said with an Ellen G White statement. The result is that the statements used are often those that, however unintentionally, back up the point the speaker or writer is making, not necessarily what Ellen G White may have had in mind.

This was a problem that Ellen G White herself faced. The subject under discussion in the following quotation is health reform, but the principle is the same for any subject:

We see those who will select from the testimonies the strongest expressions and, without bringing in or making any account of the circumstances under which the cautions and warnings are given, make them of force in every case. Thus they produce unhealthy impressions upon the minds of the people. There are always those who are ready to grasp anything of a character which they can use to rein up people to a close, severe test, and who will work elements of their own characters into the reforms. This, at the very outset, raises the combativeness of the very ones they might help if they dealt carefully, bearing a healthful influence which would carry the people with them. They will go at the work, making a raid upon the people. Picking out some things in the testimonies they drive them upon every one, and disgust rather than win souls. They make divisions when they might and should make peace. — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 285.

Ellen G White herself offered the solution to the problem. Here the subject was the age for entering school, but, again, the principle is the same for any subject:

God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things. — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 217.

An illustration may help understand this issue. At one time, it was the understanding of many Adventists that the fourth commandment not only required the keeping of the seventh day, but also required working six days.

During the 1890s the Adventist Religious Liberty Association was particularly vehement on this issue. At one point when Ellen G White came out with the statements advocating taking a low profile in Sunday rather than working openly (*Testimonies*, volume 9, pp. 232-238), A. T. Jones, the editor of the *Sabbath Sentinel*, flatly accused Ellen G White of advocating that Adventists accept the mark of the beast.<sup>11</sup>

The following sources are helpful on this topic:

1. George Knight, *Myths In Adventism*, chapter 1, "The Myth of the Inflexible Prophet." (Review and Herald Publishing Association)
2. George Knight, *Angry Saints*, Chapter 5 "Crisis in Authority." (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1989).
3. "The Nature and Influence of the 'Testimonies.'" *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 654 - 691.

In this case, A.T. Jones and his colleagues assigned more authority to their personal ideas and biblical interpretations than to the counsels of Ellen G White.

### **The Mixed Statements Misunderstanding**

This is the misunderstanding of mixing up Ellen G White statements with those of others, and crediting inspiration to all. This happens unintentionally because of selective hearing, selective quoting, and careless attention to details.

An example is the habit of A. T. Jones of mixing Ellen G White's language with his own, and presenting the whole thing as "inspiration." Ellen G White wrote him:

The influence of your teaching would be tenfold greater if you were careful of your words. The precious talent of speech must never be misused. It is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Life and character stand upon great, solid, permanent principles. Do not, when referring to the *Testimonies*,

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<sup>11</sup>See George Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), p. 84.

feel it your duty to drive them home. In reading the *Testimonies*, be sure not to mix in your filling of words, for it is impossible for the hearers to tell what is the word of the Lord to them and what are your words. Be careful that you do not make the words of the Lord offensive. There are methods that are always right when worked by the Holy Spirit. There are wrong methods; quick, severe speech, words not the best adapted to win and to heal the wounded soul, are of self. — *Manuscript Releases*, Volume 19, p. 200.

This misunderstanding was for many years (and sometimes still is) prevalent regarding Uriah Smith's *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*. Uriah Smith was a highly influential and respected church leader.

Somehow the word got around that Ellen G White had said that an angel stood by his side as he wrote *Daniel and Revelation* (See *Comprehensive Index To The Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 3, p. 3189 for an explanation of this statement).

W. C. White remarked that some Adventist ministers gave "equal importance to the quotations of Scripture, and to Eld. Smith's comments."<sup>12</sup> Knight quotes letters from W. C. White and others to the effect that:

When the book (*Daniel and Revelation*) underwent revision for translation in 1887, W. C. White recalled, 'they brought forward what had been written by [Ellen G White] endorsing the work of Elder Smith, and the teaching that he had the help of heavenly angles in his work; and these things were enlarged upon, until the president of the Publishing Association practically took the position that *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation* was inspired, and ought not to be changed in any way.<sup>13</sup>

### **Misunderstandings Based on Apocryphal Statements**

It is interesting that some of the most remembered Ellen G White statements are apocryphal. Volume 3 of the *Comprehensive Index To The Writings of Ellen G White* has four pages of apocryphal statements, ranging from a report about a Sabbath meal on another planet to a report about the name of the last president of the United States before the time of trouble.

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<sup>12</sup>See George Knight, *Angry Saints*, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, p. 101

The following table lists the category of statements found in the *Comprehensive Index To The Writings of Ellen G. White*.

<b>Type of Statement</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Testimonies Dependent on Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sabbath meal on another planet.</li> <li>• Inspired authorship of Daniel and Revelation.</li> <li>• Identity of Melchizedek as Holy Spirit.</li> <li>• Mountain hideouts for time of trouble.</li> </ul>
Association of ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status of students in school preparing for the Lord's work.</li> <li>• Legalized liquor and Sunday laws.</li> <li>• Specific targets for impending disaster.</li> </ul>
Excerpts take out of context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second coming at midnight.</li> <li>• Eggs on your table.</li> <li>• Ellen G White and the 144,000.</li> </ul>
Writings of others attributed to Ellen G White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literal darkness at the close of probation.</li> <li>• Angels rearranging environments and changing circumstances.</li> <li>• Last mediatorial work of Christ for backsliden youth.</li> <li>• Counsel on planning and living.</li> <li>• Importance of the study of the 144,000</li> </ul>
Fiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apostasy of churches and conferences.</li> <li>• Rejection of message of Jones and Waggoner same as Caleb and Joshua.</li> <li>• Political party or family name of last president of the USA.</li> </ul>

## Assignment 7

### How Well Have You Mastered The Material In This Unit?

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This is a self-graded assignment. Don't look at the answers until you have finished the assignment. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

The following statements are either true or false. Circle the answer you think is correct. If you answer "False," give a reason why you think the statement is not true.

1. T F Dreams and visions are usually suspect and not something God uses today to communicate with humanity.
2. T F The gift of prophecy is usually given because people specifically pray to receive it so they can become an authority in the church.
3. T F Ellen White functioned primarily as a "classical" prophetess.
4. T F There is good evidence that the gift of prophecy ceased, except in the case of Ellen White, when the last of the apostles died.
5. T F Ellen White believed that her gift of prophecy was in all respects equal in authority to the Bible.
6. T F Seventh-day Adventists believe in what is called a "dynamic" process of inspiration.
7. T F It is very easy for unwritten traditions to arise in the church that really have no basis in fact.
8. T F Inspired writers never use any sources. Everything they write or say comes directly from God.
9. T F The *Testimonies* transmit tough messages, and they need to be used in tough ways in order to wake people up and get them on the right track, especially when the track agrees with my own thinking.
10. T F There are apocryphal Ellen White statements that have given birth to some Adventist traditions.

Match up the following columns. You can either draw a line between the two, or put the letter from the second column on the line beside the correct number in the first column.

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. Isaiah's wife.  | a. Fundamental Belief No. 17         |
| _____ 2. Termed the "greater light" by Ellen G White.  | b. Rev. 19:10                        |
| _____ 3. Prime advocate of verbal inspiration among Seventh-day Adventists.                    | c. Holy Spirit                       |
| _____ 4. One who assigns the gift of prophecy.   | d. Analogy of faith                  |
| _____ 5. Wrote a book entitled <i>Myths in Adventism</i> .                                     | e. Amos 3:7                          |
| _____ 6. Text that is the source for the phrase "Spirit of Prophecy."                          | f. W.W. Prescott                     |
| _____ 7. What we all need in order to interpret correctly.                                     | g. Prophetess mentioned in the Bible |
| _____ 8. Text indicating God's system of communicating through prophets.                       | h. The Bible                         |
| _____ 9. Resides in Scripture and cannot be superseded by any other authority.                 | i. Pildor the Silophite              |
| _____ 10. Officially spells out the Seventh-day Adventist belief on the role of Ellen G White. | j. Common sense                      |
|  | k. George Knight                     |
|  | l. Fundamental Belief No. 18         |
|  | m. Uriah Smith                       |

**Answers.**

True or False: 1 (F) 2 (F) 3 (T) 4 (F) 5 (F) 6 (T) 7 (T) 8 (F) 9 (F) 10 (T)  
Matching: 1 (g) 2 (h) 3 (f) 4 (c) 5 (k) 6 (b) 7 (j) 8 (e) 9 (d) 10 (l)

## **How to Interpret the Writings of Ellen G White**

The purpose of this section is to describe and illustrate the principles that serve as guidelines for interpreting the writings of Ellen G White.

Ellen G White wrote over a seventy-year period. Some communications were written for individuals, others for the church and still others for both Adventist and non-Adventist readers. Ellen G White herself has provided guideline to interpretation in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 654-696, "The Nature and Influence of the Testimonies," and in *Selected Messages*, Bk. I, pp. 15-58.

When you complete this section you should be able to:

1. Articulate either verbally or in writing the basic principles of interpreting the writings of Ellen White.
2. Articulate either verbally or in writing how you would go about using these principles.

## **Principles of interpretation**

The same principles of interpretation that apply to the Bible apply to the writings of Ellen G White, with the understanding that her writings are authoritative only as they agree with Scripture:

1. They are their own interpreter and follow the principle of the analogy of faith.
2. They mean just what they say unless there is obvious reason to think otherwise.
3. The writings of Ellen G White are of the same divine-human nature as the Bible. Ellen G White was part of her historical period and culture. In interpreting her writings, time, place and circumstances must be taken into consideration.
4. Know the difference between interpretation and application.

For purposes of making them as easy to understand as possible, the principles for interpreting the writings of Ellen G White are grouped into five categories:

1. Principles dealing with the inspiration of the Ellen G White writings.
2. Principles dealing with the authority of the Ellen G White writings.
3. Principles dealing with what not to do with the Ellen G White writings.
4. Principles dealing with the interpretation of the Ellen G White writings.
5. Principles dealing with the worldwide application of the Ellen G White writings.

## **Principle 1: The Inspiration of the Ellen G White Writings**

As studied previously, the gift of prophecy is assigned to a person through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. It is important to keep in mind the way the light was imparted by God to His prophets.

### **No Degrees of Inspiration**

There are no degrees of inspiration. You cannot pick and choose. Having committed ourselves to an acceptance of the Spirit of Prophecy, we are not at liberty to accept a part or reject a part. "There are," Ellen G White wrote, "some professed believers who accept certain portions of the *Testimonies* as the message of God, while they reject those portions that condemn their favorite indulgences. Such persons are working contrary to their own welfare and the welfare of the church. It is essential that we walk in the light while we have the light."— *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 154.

## **The Ellen G White Writings Are Their Own Interpreter**

The same principle, called the analogy of faith, applies to her writings just as it does to the Bible. "The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture." — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 42.

This is where the issue of verbal inspiration comes in. Ellen G White never claimed verbal inspiration for herself. Nor did she claim that everything she said at any particular moment had its source in the gift of prophecy.

In applying the gift of prophecy, she wrote: "Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation." — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 37.

## **Principle 2: The Authority of the Ellen G White Writings**

The writings of Ellen G White provide an authoritative voice distinguishing between truth and error. God uses the writings of Ellen G White to guard the church against erroneous doctrinal teachings, to identify truth, and to develop an acceptable lifestyle.

*Fundamental Belief* No. 18 makes the position of the Seventh-day Adventist church regarding the relationship between the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White very clear:

As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

## **An Example**

Notice what happened in the early days of the church when our doctrinal base was being defined. Different views were studied and expounded by those who became our church founders. The gift of prophecy intervened only at specific points in the study: "The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error. — *Gospel Workers*, p. 302. Note that the gift of prophecy was not the *origin* of the doctrine; it functioned as an agent of discernment "to define what is truth and what is error."

Once a point is clearly distinguished as true, it stands. "When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, the truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light of God has given are to be entertained."— *Selected Messages*, Bk 1, p. 161.

Statements like the following, penned in 1910, indicate that these writings would continue to fill an important place in defining truth and error beyond the lifetime of the messenger.

The Lord has given me much light that I want people to have; for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for His people. It is light that they should have, line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious error and to specify what truth is. — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 32.

## **Principle 3: What *Not To Do* With The Ellen G White Writings**

There is some very specific counsel in the writings of Ellen G White about what *not to do* with her writings:

1. *Do not block creativity.* The counsels are not given to take the place of faith, initiative, hard work, creativity, or Bible study. The proper use of the writings of Ellen G White will lead to these things happening.

2. *Preconceived opinions.* Do not use the writings of Ellen G White to prove preconceived opinions. Ellen G White is very clear on this point:

Why will not men see and live the truth? Many study the Scriptures for the purpose of proving their own ideas to be correct. They change the meaning of

God's Word to suit their own opinions. And thus they do also with the testimonies that He sends. They quote half a sentence, leaving out the other half, which, if quoted, would show their reasoning to be false. God has a controversy with those who wrest the Scriptures, making them conform to their preconceived ideas. — *Selected Messages* Bk. 3. p. 82.

### **Unauthenticated statements**

This point has been the cause of many problems that arise in the interpretation of the writings of Ellen White.

And now to all who have a desire for truth I would say: Do not give credence to unauthenticated reports as to what Sister White has done or said or written. If you desire to know what the Lord has revealed through her, read her published works. Are there any points of interest concerning which she has not written, do not eagerly catch up and report rumors as to what she has said. — *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 696.

## **Principle 4: The Interpretation of the Ellen White's Writings**

### **Putting it all together**

The same principle of getting the information together is as valid for the writings of Ellen G White as it is for the Bible. Counsels on a given point may have been written at different times and under varying circumstances. Some counsels are more comprehensive than others. By bringing them all together you get the complete picture.

We always must remember that the gift of prophecy controlled her; she did not control the gift of prophecy! In her experience, there was often an initial kind of broad outline vision in a certain area of instruction, followed in succeeding years by others complementing the initial vision and revealing more details. This was true with the Great Controversy story, health reform, education, etc.

### **The context**

Study specific counsels in their setting. The counsels given apply to an incident of experience. The same principle of biblical interpretation, "What did it mean then; what does it mean now" applies to her writings.

The context usually makes the application clear and prevents a misuse of a particular statement or circumstance. For instance, *Testimonies for the Church* vol. 2, p. 400, contains the following sentence: "Eggs should not be placed on your table." The context reveals that this counsel was given to a particular family in which certain conditions prevailed; conditions clearly revealed in the testimony itself. Ellen G White included this message of counsel in *Testimonies for the Church* as an aid and reference point to other families who might face the same problems. It is a serious misuse of this sentence to give it a general application and reprimand everyone who eats an egg.<sup>14</sup>

### **Time and place**

Time and place must be considered. Ellen G White herself affirmed this: "Regarding the *Testimonies*, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered." — *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 57.

Principles are timeless, but certain counsels specifically applying a principle should be studied and interpreted in the light of contemporary conditions and the time of writing. On the other hand, there must also be clear evidence that a change in circumstances has taken

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<sup>14</sup> See statements in *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 135; vol. 9, p. 162; and *Ministry of Healing*, p. 320 about the rightful place of eggs in a normal dietary program.

place before this principle can be correctly applied. It is the context of the writings that make this decision, not the personal opinion of the reader.

For instance, an 1894 testimony concerning the “bicycle craze” can be properly understood and applied only in the light of the circumstances of the times. Notice what was taking place in Battle Creek: “There seemed to be a bicycle craze. Money was spent to gratify an enthusiasm. . . . A bewitching influence seemed to be passing as a wave over our people there. . . . *Satan works with intensity of purpose to induce our people to invest their time and money in gratifying supposed wants.* This is a species of idolatry, . . . There were some who were striving for the mastery, each striving to excel the other in the swift running of their bicycles.” — *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 51, 52

Phrases like “craze,” “bewitching influence,” “gratifying supposed wants” and “striving for the mastery” are immediate clues to circumstances and principles. The phrase “species of idolatry” is a direct analysis of the spiritual problem produced by the “craze.”

### **Figuring Out Time and Circumstances**

To properly understand and apply this counsel, you have to know something about the situation in the mid-1890's.

A few sentences from an article in *The Reader's Digest* of December, 1951 furnish this information: “Toward the end of the last century the American people were swept with a consuming-passion which left them with little time or money for anything else . . . . What was this big new distraction? For answer the merchants had only to look out the window and watch their erstwhile customers go whizzing by. America had discovered the bicycle and everybody was making the most of the new freedom it brought. . . . The bicycle began as a rich man's toy. Society and celebrity went awheel . . . . The best early bicycle cost \$150, an investment comparable to the cost of an automobile today. . . . Every member of the family wanted a ‘wheel,’ and entire family savings often were used up in supplying the demand.”

Now we know why Ellen G White said what she did! It was a matter of priorities, not the bicycle itself that was the problem.

Because of the rapid changes of circumstances, within a few years the bicycle became a most economical means of transportation. The testimony of 1894 does not stand in the way of the proper use of this now inexpensive vehicle. Today various organizations within the church raise money to buy bicycles in quantity for colporteurs, pastors and others around the world who need cheap transportation.

### **What Are the Principles Involved?**

Nevertheless, in this experience certain principles remain unchanged, regardless of the current status of the bicycle. They are useful in helping to shape our attitudes toward that which today may be the counterpart of the 1894 bicycle culture.

A case in point is the story told by a pastoral colleague of the church member who strenuously objected to a new convert's “ostentatious” adornment, then proceeded to flash his own very costly gold-plated Rolex wristwatch, marched indignantly out of the building, got into his top-of-the-line Mercedes, and drove away to enjoy his personal degree of sainthood in more amenable surroundings. Draw your own conclusions!

Another illustration is found in *Testimonies*, vol. 7 pp. 83, 84 relative to masonry buildings for medical institutions. Because “brick and stone buildings” were “generally cold and damp” and “costly,” and, from a health standpoint, “a wooden building is preferable to one of brick,” the counsels of 1902 pointed in the direction of frame buildings.

Guided by the clearly stated principles of economy, health, and patient well-being, church leaders today, facing building-code restrictions, find no compromise of principle in the use of brick and masonry. With modern building and heating methods, this construction is healthful, comfortable and, in long-range planning, more economical and safer than frame construction.

### **Time Does Not Invalidate the Principles Revealed; Only the Circumstances**

In 1907 Ellen G White wrote: "Time and trial have not made void the instruction given . . . The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days. — *Selected Messages*, Bk, 1, p. 41.

At the General Conference session of 1909 Ellen G White declared: "I have been shown that the principles that were given us in the early days of the message are as important and should be regarded just as conscientiously today as they were then." — *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 158.

### **Recognition That Some Things Are Hard to Understand**

Satan has the ability to suggest doubts and to devise objections to the pointed testimony that God sends, and many think it a virtue, a mark of intelligence in them, to be unbelieving and to question and quibble. Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence. — *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 657.

### **Principle 6: Worldwide Application of the Ellen G White Writings**

The counsels in the writings of Ellen G White are worldwide in scope. They were never intended to serve in only one country. Discovering the principles involved will aid in applying the counsel in any geographical location.

For every six years Ellen G White worked in the United States, she spent one year overseas. For instance, the counsels regarding educational work recorded in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 6 were penned in Australia, but guide educational work equally anywhere in the world. God knew what His people would need, and gave instruction adaptable to all.

## Assignment 7

### How Well Have You Mastered The Material In This Unit?

- ***Be sure to record on your Student Fulfillment Card that you have completed this assignment.***

This is a self-graded assignment. If you are studying in a group, your instructor will advise about this assignment.

1. The Unit contains a section entitled "Do Not Block Creativity." How is it possible to block creativity through the wrong application of the writings to Ellen White?
2. How is it possible to use the writings of Ellen White in a creative way without violating their authority?
3. What is an "unauthenticated" Ellen White statement?
4. What does it mean to "take into account the time and place of specific counsels?"
5. In 1902 Ellen White wrote that it is generally better to build hospital buildings of wood rather than brick. That is not even allowed by many building codes today. Are we violating the authority of the Ellen White writings by using other building materials? If not, why not? Explain.
6. The Study Guide contains a statement that the Ellen White writings are valid through time. It also says that time and place have to be taken into account. How do you put these two things together?

## Student Fulfillment Card

### How to Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G White

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church/District \_\_\_\_\_

This Fulfillment Card is the record that you have successfully completed the core class *How to Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G White* of the North American Division Adult Ministries Department Sabbath School Teacher training curriculum. When all the items are completed, have the Fulfillment Card signed by the appropriate person (your class instructor, your Internet instructor, a Sabbath School superintendent, person in charge of Sabbath School teachers in your church/district, your pastor or someone from the conference in charge of Sabbath School teacher training).

#### Check the items completed

- I have read the five Units of the Study Guide.
- I have read the following:
  - Reading 1: "A Short Essay on Views of Inspiration."
  - Reading 2: "Which Version Can We Trust"
  - Reading 3: "The Use of the Modified Historical-Critical Approach by Adventist Scholars."
  - Reading 4: "Important Statements on Biblical Interpretation in the Writings of Ellen G. White."
  - Reading 5: "Some Examples of Bible Biography Teaching Ideas."
- I have completed Assignment 1: "Revelation and Christianity."
- I have completed Assignment 2: "The Bible and Christian Experience."
- I have completed Assignment 3: "Revelation, Inspiration, Illumination."
- I have completed Assignment 4: "Working with Bible Translations and Versions."
- I have completed Assignment 5: "Do It Yourself."
- I have completed Assignment 6: "How Well Have You Mastered the Material."
- I have completed Assignment 7: "How Well Have You Mastered the Material."

\_\_\_\_\_ has satisfactorily completed the course *How to Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G White*.

(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

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