

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Second Quarter 2020: *How to Interpret Scripture*

Lesson 6 “Why Is Interpretation Needed?”

Read for this week’s study

Luke 24:36–45; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 17:16–32; John 12:42, 43.

Memory Text

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Presuppositions
- III. Translation and Interpretation
- IV. The Bible and Culture
- V. Our Sinful and Fallen Nature
- VI. Why Interpretation Is Important
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” What is faith? How do we go about defining faith from the biblical context? How do Hebrews 10:35-11:1, John 17:3, Exodus 33:11, 17, Romans 10:17, Psalm 51:6, 10, 16-17, Hosea 6:6, James 2:14, 19, 21-23, Hebrews 11:31-32, and Luke 23:42-43 help us define what faith meant in the biblical context? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Luke 24:36-45. What prevented the disciples, who were very familiar with Scripture, from seeing the true meaning of the Word of God, even when events predicted in it had unfolded before them? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read John 1:41, John 9:7, and Acts 9:36. What is going on in these passages? What can we learn from them about Bible versions today? How can one learn the strengths and weaknesses of a given translation if you don’t know the original languages that they are based on? Read 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:26. What principles of interpretation are highlighted here? Is Luke 24:27 a one-off

interpretational experience or can we apply it today? If so, how could we do this? (Monday's lesson)

4. Read Acts 17:16-32 (compare with Acts 17:1-3). How did the cultural background Paul was speaking to change the way he approached the topic? How do different cultural backgrounds impact how we evaluate the importance of various ideas? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read John 9:39-41 and 12:42-43. What hindered people in these passages from accepting the biblical message? To what degree are we susceptible to similar issues today? What is the role of doubt in interpretation? Can doubt play a positive role or only a negative one? Have you ever found yourself fighting against conviction when something you read in the Bible challenged how you live your life? What did you do when that happened? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8. In the event described in Nehemiah, a team of "interpreters" help unpack the meaning of the texts that were being read. But what does the church do when people are divided on the meaning of a biblical text? Read 2 Peter 3:15-16. What does this text tell us about the importance of a correct reading of Scripture? How do people end up "twisting" Scripture? What are some safeguards we can install to make it less likely that we will distort the meaning of the Bible? (Thursday's lesson)
7. How do our worldview, our education, and our culture influence our interpretation of Scripture? In what ways does sin affect how we read the Bible? How might a desire to do something condemned in the Bible cause us to read the Bible in a skewed way? How can a better understanding of the biblical times and culture help us better understand some passages of Scripture? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

But God's real feeling in Malachi is, "I hate divorce." Most people do. And that is the key to so many other problems in the Bible where God seems to recommend something. No, he's *meeting them where they are*.

That brings up the fundamental principle of interpretation, which we must use throughout the rest of our conversation, the principle of context. It was the context—it was the setting—that determined the meaning of a passage when it was originally written. To the extent that we can recreate and recover that original setting we are in a position to recover the original meaning. When Paul says, "I wish you could be as I am. It's all right to marry if you must, but I wish you could be as I am," does that mean that all of us are second class saints if we're married?

No, put it in its context. Why did he say, "I would not allow a woman to speak in church"? And why does the Old Testament say, "You cannot boil a kid in its mother's milk"? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6, "Evaluating the

Evidence” recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>*

Lou: In the Bible reference sheet you use the word “reverence” as a synonym for fear. Why don’t the versions use that word consistently? It seems like that would be a help, anyway.

Graham: Well, it would be a matter of interpretation, and this enters into the whole philosophy of translation. Should a version render the original literally? None of them does. They’d be quite unreadable. The question is, how much shall we interpret? And there’s always a hesitation. When a man like Dr. Taylor does a sincere job, a paraphrase, he gets into trouble for doing it, he has interpreted so much. He admits doing it. He did it deliberately. But there is always tension between precisely representing the original and interpreting and then making it clear. So the *Revised Standard*, which is very conservative, reads ‘fear’, and leaves it up to the reader to determine from the context whether it’s terror or reverence. That’s why I like more than one version. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9 with Lou Venden, “There is No Need To Be Afraid of God” recorded March, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

But isn’t it true that some versions are more literal, while others interpret rather than translate?

It is not possible to translate without interpretation. There is a great deal of interpretation in every major English version of the Bible, including such supposedly uninterpretative versions as the King James, Douay, and Wycliffe.

It is true that some interpret with greater freedom, clarity, and consistency. These are the ones that give me the most help.

Are there any versions that one could not recommend? Are any of the many translations not safe for one to trust?

Yes. When a version openly announces itself as translated “from the metaphysical viewpoint” (there is one) or “based on numerology” (there is one), one is immediately warned to take care.

Or when a version seems to be the special possession of some religious group and contains unusual translations that are given particular emphasis by this group, again I would say, Beware!

Truth needs no special version of the Book.

But isn't it confusing to be faced with so many different ways of translating the same passage? Wouldn't it be better to have just one?

Consider, for example, one of the most significant Greek words used in the New Testament to summarize the purpose of Christ's sacrificial death. In Romans 3:25 Paul declares that the Son of God thereby became our *hilasterion*. For centuries Bible translators have wrestled with this term.

Wycliffe (1382) translates, "an helper," changed in a later edition to "forgiver."

Tyndale (1525) prefers "a seat of mercy," following the leadership of Luther, who invented the name "mercy seat" for the golden covering of the ark.

The Great Bible (1539) translates, "the obtainer of mercy."

Whittingham (1557) offers "a pacification," changed later in the Geneva Bible (1560) to "a reconciliation."

The Bishops' Bible (1568) translates, "a propitiation," the words adopted by the King James Version in 1611.

Goodspeed (1923) chooses "a sacrifice of reconciliation."

Mrs. Montgomery (1924) renders, "an offering of atonement."

The Basic English (1941) translates, "the sign of His mercy."

The Revised Standard Version (1946) offers "an expiation."

The New English Bible (1961) interprets, "the means of expiating sin."

Other versions present numerous additional alternatives.

The very variety of translations bespeaks the broad significance of this term and warns against the error of too hasty or narrow an interpretation. It makes apparent the necessity of more careful and wider study of Scripture to discover further clues as to Paul's inspired intention in this vital passage. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 50-52. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

So many things in the Bible reflect the times and the culture, and in the Bible God does meet people where they are and speak a language they can understand. He doesn't seek to change culture all at once. Take slavery, for example. Even in the New Testament, the Bible does not recommend a revolution to bring slavery to an end. Rather, it's the book of Philemon. But if Philemon had heeded, and evidently he did, Paul's message in that very short half-page epistle, Onesimus was no longer treated as a slave but as a brother. But Paul did say, "Go home and be

the best servant in that household.” But then he said to Philemon, “Would you treat this servant as your brother.” And if tradition is correct, there is evidence that Onesimus may have become the Bishop of Ephesus and a leader in the Christian church. If that’s true, then Philemon did heed the message.

But take polygamy. Does the Bible seek to overturn polygamy? Was Abraham told to have only one wife? Was Jacob told to have only one? Was David told to have only one? David at one time says “the Lord has blessed me, been very generous, with all these wives.” Why was that not overturned? Why, on the Mount of Sinai, didn’t Jesus give the Sermon on the Mount immediately and get on with the business of turning those Jews into Christians? God is very patient in leading us no faster than we are able to follow. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Deuteronomy*, recorded November, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/9MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/10MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

The work of grace upon the heart is not an instantaneous work. It is effected by continuous, daily watching and believing the promises of God. The repentant, believing one, who cherishes faith and earnestly desires the renewing grace of Christ, God will not turn away empty. He will give him grace. And ministering angels will aid him as he perseveres in his efforts to advance.—Manuscript 55, 1910. {Ev 287.3}

Our God is a very present help in time of need. He is acquainted with the most secret thoughts of our hearts, with all the intents and purposes of our souls. When we are in perplexity, even before we open to Him our distresses, He is making arrangements for our deliverance.—Letter 73, Feb. 1, 1905, to Drs. D. H. and Laretta Kress. {UL 46.6}

Revelation is not the creation or invention of something new, but the manifestation of that which, until revealed, was unknown to human beings. The great and eternal truths contained in the gospel are revealed through diligent searching and humbling of ourselves before God. We have a divine Teacher who leads the mind of the humble searcher for truth; and by the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the truths of the Word are revealed to him. And there can be no more certain and efficient knowledge of the truth than to be thus guided into all truth. Through the impartation of the Holy Spirit, we are to understand God’s Word. We are admonished to seek the truth as if searching for hidden treasure. {LHU 181.2}

The truth, if received, is capable of constant expansion and new developments. It will increase in brightness as we behold it, and grow in height and depth as we aspire to grasp it. Thus it will elevate us to the standard of perfection, and give us faith and trust in God as our strength for the work before us. {TMK 340.3}

God has recorded many narratives in His Inspired Word to teach us that the human family is the object of the special care of heavenly angels. Man is not left to become the sport of Satan's temptations. All heaven is actively engaged in the work of communicating light to the inhabitants of the world, that they may not be left without spiritual guidance. An eye that never slumbers nor sleeps is guarding the camp of Israel. Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels are ministering to the needs of the children of men. Voices inspired by God are crying, This is the way, walk ye in it. If men will hear the voice of warning, if they will trust to God's guidance and not to finite judgment, they will be safe.... {HP 103.2}

In all ages God has given human beings divine revelations, that thus He may fulfill His purpose of unfolding gradually to the mind the doctrines of grace. His manner of imparting the truth is illustrated by the words, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." He who places himself where God can enlighten him, advances, as it were, from the partial obscurity of dawn to the full radiance of noonday. {ML 109.4}

Sin not only shuts away from God, but destroys in the human soul both the desire and the capacity for knowing Him. Through sin, the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted; the faculties of the soul are degraded. There is an absence of pure religion, of heart holiness. The converting power of God has not wrought in transforming the character. The soul is weak, and for want of moral force to overcome, is polluted and debased. {PK 233.1}

To the heart that has become purified, all is changed. Transformation of character is the testimony to the world of an indwelling Christ. The Spirit of God produces a new life in the soul, bringing the thoughts and desires into obedience to the will of Christ; and the inward man is renewed in the image of God. Weak and erring men and women show to the world that the redeeming power of grace can cause the faulty character to develop into symmetry and abundant fruitfulness. {PK 233.2}

When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), and it was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal this image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator. All his faculties were capable of development; their capacity and vigor were continually to increase. Vast was the scope offered for their exercise, glorious the field opened to their research. The mysteries of the visible universe—the "wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16)—invited man's study.

Face-to-face, heart-to-heart communion with his Maker was his high privilege. Had he remained loyal to God, all this would have been his forever. Throughout eternal ages he would have continued to gain new treasures of knowledge, to discover fresh springs of happiness, and to obtain clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. More and more fully would he have fulfilled the object of his creation, more and more fully have reflected the Creator's glory. {Ed 15.1}

But by disobedience this was forfeited. Through sin the divine likeness was marred, and well-nigh obliterated. Man's physical powers were weakened, his mental capacity was lessened, his spiritual vision dimmed. He had become subject to death. . . . {Ed 15.2}

God could employ only such means as were consistent with truth and righteousness. Satan could use what God could not—flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government, claiming that God was not just in imposing laws upon the angels; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. It was therefore necessary to demonstrate before the inhabitants of heaven, and of all the worlds, that God's government is just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works. {PP 42.1}

The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore God permitted him to demonstrate the nature of his claims, to show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked. {PP 42.2}

Even when he was cast out of heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since only the service of love can be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question. {PP 42.3}

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages—a perpetual testimony to the nature of sin and its terrible results. The working out of Satan's rule, its effects

upon both men and angels, would show what must be the fruit of setting aside the divine authority. It would testify that with the existence of God's government is bound up the well-being of all the creatures He has made. Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy beings, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin, and suffering its penalty. {PP 42.4}

But even as a sinner, man was in a different position from that of Satan. Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God's glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God's love. Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him. But man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan's sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God's love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God. {DA 761.5}

The search for truth will reward the seeker at every turn, and each discovery will open up richer fields for his investigation. Men are changed in accordance with what they contemplate. If commonplace thoughts and affairs take up the attention, the man will be commonplace. If he is too negligent to obtain anything but a superficial understanding of God's truth, he will not receive the rich blessings that God would be pleased to bestow upon him. It is a law of the mind, that it will narrow or expand to the dimensions of the things with which it becomes familiar. {MYP 262.1}

The Spirit of Christ, working upon the heart conforms it to His image; for Christ is the model upon which the Spirit works. By the ministry of His Word, by His providences, by His inward working, God stamps the likeness of Christ upon the soul. {TDG 46.5}

The study of God's word is continually expanding the mind and strengthening the intellect. There is nothing that will so refine and elevate the character, and give vigor to every faculty, as the continual exercise of the mind to grasp and comprehend weighty and important truths. {4T 545.3}

God does not desire you to remain novices. He needs in His work everything that you can gain here in the lines of mental culture and clear discernment. He desires to have you reach the very highest round of the ladder, and then step off it into the kingdom of God. {SD 330.4}

The Lord desires you to understand the position you occupy as sons and daughters of the Most High, children of the heavenly King. {SD 330.5}

God takes men as they are, and educates them for His service, if they will yield themselves to Him. The Spirit of God, received into the soul, will quicken all its faculties. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously, and is strengthened to comprehend and fulfill the requirements of God. The weak, vacillating

character becomes changed to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. Through a connection with Christ he will have clearer and broader views. His discernment will be more penetrative, his judgment better balanced. He who longs to be of service to Christ is so quickened by the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness that he is enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God. {DA 251.1}

As we near the time when principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places will be brought into warfare against the truth, when the deceiving power of Satan will be so great that if it were possible he will deceive the very elect, we must have our discernment sharpened by divine enlightenment, that we may know the Spirit that is of God, that we may not be ignorant of Satan's devices. {MR311 49.1}

Peace comes with dependence on divine power. As fast as the soul resolves to act in accordance with the light given, the Holy Spirit gives more light and strength. {TM 518.1}

The minds of all who make the Word of God their study will enlarge. Far more than any other study its influence is calculated to increase the powers of comprehension and endow every faculty with a new power. It brings the mind in contact with broad, ennobling principles of truth. It brings all heaven into close connection with human minds, imparting wisdom and knowledge and understanding. {OHC 35.4}

The Bible unfolds truth with a simplicity and a perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart, that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while it enables the humblest and uncultured to discern the way of salvation. {SC 107.2}

But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion. {5T 706.2}

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what. {5T 707.1}

There is no excuse for any one in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are

infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. {RH, December 20, 1892 par. 1}

[H]owever long men may have entertained certain views, if they are not clearly sustained by the written word, they should be discarded. {RH, July 26, 1892 par. 3}

Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed. {RH, July 26, 1892 par. 4}

The words, "A new heart will I give you," mean, A new mind will I give you. This change of heart is always attended by a clear conception of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. The clearness of our views of truth will be proportionate to our understanding of the Word of God. He who gives the Scriptures close, prayerful attention will gain clear comprehension and sound judgment, as if in turning to God he had reached a higher grade of intelligence. {RH, November 10, 1904 par. 5}