

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Second Quarter 2020: *How to Interpret Scripture*
Lesson 7 “Language, Text, and Context”

Read for this week’s study

Deuteronomy 32:46, 47; 1 Kings 3:6; Numbers 6:24–26; Genesis 1:26, 27; Genesis 2:15–23; 15:1–5.

Memory Text

“ ‘Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you’ ” (Deuteronomy 31:26, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Understanding the Scriptures
- III. Words and Their Meanings
- IV. Repetition, Word Patterns, and Meaning
- V. Texts and Contexts
- VI. Books and Their Message
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. There are more than 6000 languages in the world, with portions at least of the New Testament in 2500 of them. All in all, about 80% of the people in the world have access to at least a portion of the Bible in their own native language. How do you think God deals with the fact that 20% of the world’s people have no written access to God’s word? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. In your own words, what is the purpose of the Bible? Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How does this passage describe the purpose of the Bible? Much of the Bible is written in Hebrew, a language chosen because it in many ways reflects the character and mindset of God. But the New Testament is in Greek, a very different language philosophically. What is the significance of this change? Read Deuteronomy 32:46-47. Why was it important for Israel to pay attention to “all the words” of God’s law? How would the study of God’s word prolong one’s life? (Sunday’s lesson)

3. Why does God so frequently use ambiguous language in the Bible? Why do even the disciples have difficulty understanding Jesus sometimes? What do you do when the meaning of a word or a text is ambiguous? What do the Hebrew words *chesed* and *shalom* tell us about God? See 1 Kings 3:6, Psalm 57:3, 66:3-6, 20, 143:8, Micah 7:20, and Numbers 6:24-26, Job 3:26, Isaiah 9:6, 32:17. (Monday's lesson)
4. Unlike European languages, Hebrew contains no punctuation marks in the original, so the language structure had to develop other ways to emphasize a point; such as repetition and word patterns. Note the use of repetition to make a point in Genesis 1:26-27, Isaiah 6:1-3 and Daniel 3:1-18. (Tuesday's lesson)
5. An important piece of biblical interpretation is, as far as possible, to read each text with an eye to the wider context. Compare Genesis 1:27 with 2:7 and 2:15-23. Is Adam merely a local figure here or does he represent something much larger? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. The largest units in Scripture are the books of the Bible. As we seek to understand a book's meaning and message, it is important to begin with authorship and setting. Example: Who wrote the book of Genesis? Read Genesis 15:1-5 and 22:17-18. How does the understanding that Moses wrote Genesis impact the meaning of these texts? What do Genesis 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:27 and 37:2 tell us about **how** the book of Genesis was written? (Thursday's lesson)
7. What study tools are readily available today to help us better understand the Bible? (Friday's lesson)
8. How do the stories in the Bible help to increase our faith? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

If the purpose of the Bible is to give us the truth about God, why are there so few specific statements about Him?

In answer, I sometimes ask, What if the Bible should consist mainly of God's claims about Himself? On what basis would you believe them?

When John the Baptist was languishing in prison, he began to wonder if Jesus really was the Christ. He sent some friends to ask Him for the truth.

Did Jesus tell them, "Yes, indeed I am. And I expect John to believe"?

Anyone could make this claim—even the devil himself. Only on the basis of sufficient evidence could John's serious question be given a satisfactory reply.

So Jesus answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you see and hear—that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead

being brought to life and the good news is being given to those in need. *And happy is the man who never loses his faith in Me.*” Matthew 11:4-6, Phillips.

The Bible is a record of the things that God has said and done. But most of the Bible is made up of the historical details that describe the situations within which God so acted and so spoke. Without these details we would not be in a position to understand why God chose to speak and act in such a variety of ways.

Even the lengthy genealogies have their value in helping us to reconstruct the total historical scene within which God was seeking to reveal Himself to His people. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 54-55. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

Finally, at just the right time, God came to the earth in person. He gathered the people around Him and taught them. When He found people who were sick, He healed them. When they were hungry, He fed them.

One day, at the funeral of a friend, the Bible says that He cried.

In spite of all this, not many recognized Him. Many didn't even like Him. Some even hated Him.

He simply wasn't their idea of a god—so warped was their thinking, so in error were their beliefs about God as taught them with such authority by their leaders.

It was not that they had failed to study the Scriptures. They had simply read them for the wrong reason.

The Bible is not a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned. As Jesus explained, the purpose of the Bible is to bear witness to Him, to reveal the truth about God, that men may be won to Him in faith. See John 5:39, 40.

But having misread the Scriptures, the people did not understand the meaning. They did not know the Author. They did not trust the Bible's God. They had no reason for their faith.

Instead, they rejected the One who had come to bring them life.

Finally they arrested Him and condemned Him to be executed. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, 92-93. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

For my own satisfaction I have examined all the more influential versions of the English Bible, comparing them verse by verse with each other and with the original. I have looked especially for what might appear to be willful distortion of the text for doctrinal purposes. Such instances are so extremely rare as to make themselves conspicuous and readily noted by the student.

I have more than two hundred different English translations of all or part of the Bible in my modest collection. Among these, only a handful fail to qualify as straight-forward translations of the original text.

There is, for example, a New Testament translated “from the metaphysical viewpoint.” There are the ones already mentioned in the previous chapter as “revised by the spirits,” or corrected “by direct revelation.” Also, when a version seems to be the special possession of some religious group and contains unusual translations that are given special emphasis by the group, this is a warning to beware.

Truth needs no special version of the Book!

It is true that the versions vary in methods of translation, from very literal to very free. And the more idiomatic and unambiguous the translation, the more the version will reflect the translator’s understanding of the meaning.

If the version describes itself as a paraphrase rather than a translation, as does the very popular The Living Bible, one would do well to heed the advice so candidly given by Dr. Taylor himself in his preface: “There are dangers in paraphrases, as well as values. For whenever the author’s exact words are not translated from the original languages, there is a possibility that the translator, however honest, may be giving the English reader something that the original writer did not mean to say.”

But there is paraphrase and interpretation to some extent in every translation, including the more literal King James. There is no way this can be avoided. Safety lies in using several versions, with a balance between the more literal and the more free, and comparing them with each other. The differences can be so instructive that I am glad for every version that I own. {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 63-64. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-07>

Recommended Listening:

Conversations About God #5 “The Record of the Evidence” is available at: <http://pkp.cc/5MMCAG>

Conversations About God #6 “Evaluating the Evidence” is available at: <http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>

Further Study with Ellen White

Satan is constantly urging men to accept his principles. Thus he seeks to counterwork the work of God. He is constantly representing the chosen people of God as a deluded people. He is an accuser of the brethren, and his accusing power he is constantly using against those who work righteousness. The Lord desires through His people to answer Satan's charges by showing the result of obedience to right principles. {6T 11.2}

But when we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment. He would not have us conjecture as to the success of our honest endeavors. Not once should we even think of failure. We are to co-operate with One who knows no failure. {COL 363.1}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {PP 34.3}

The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, an unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. "Come now, and let us reason together" is the Creator's invitation to the beings He has made. Isaiah 1:18. God does not force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton. Such is not the purpose of the Creator. He desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. {SC 43.4}

In calling them to His service, God offers them freedom. Obedience to God is liberty from the thralldom of sin, deliverance from human passion and impulse. {TM 247.1}

Our sanctification is the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the fulfillment of the covenant God has made with those who bind themselves up with Him, to stand with Him, His Son, and His Spirit in holy fellowship. {7BC 908.11}

In the precepts of His holy law, God has given a perfect rule of life; and He has declared that until the close of time this law, unchanged in a single jot or tittle, is to maintain its claim upon human beings. Christ came to magnify the law and make it honorable. He showed that it is based upon the broad foundation of love to God and love to man, and that obedience to its precepts comprises the whole duty of man. In His own life He gave an example of obedience to

the law of God. In the Sermon on the Mount He showed how its requirements extend beyond the outward acts and take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart. {AA 505.1}

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. {DA 668.3}

So long as they [Adam and Eve] remained loyal to the divine law, their capacity to know, to enjoy, and to love would continually increase. They would be constantly gaining new treasures of knowledge, discovering fresh springs of happiness, and obtaining clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God. {PP 51.1}

When one surrenders to Christ, the mind is brought under the control of the law; but it is the royal law, which proclaims liberty to every captive. By becoming one with Christ, man is made free. Subjection to the will of Christ means restoration to perfect manhood. {MH 131.1}

But even here Christians may have the joy of communion with Christ; they may have the light of His love, the perpetual comfort of His presence. Every step in life may bring us closer to Jesus, may give us a deeper experience of His love, and may bring us one step nearer to the blessed home of peace. {FLB 121.5}

By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." John 3:16. He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder." God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the "Son of man" who shares the throne of the universe. It is the "Son of man" whose name shall be called, "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," is not ashamed to call us brethren. Hebrews 7:26; 2:11. In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified

is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love. {DA 25.3}

Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore." Revelation 1:18. I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Isaiah 54:10. {DA 483.1}

In the Teacher sent from God, heaven gave to men its best and greatest. He who had stood in the councils of the Most High, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, was the One chosen to reveal in person to humanity the knowledge of God. {Ed 73.2}

Christ is "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), and it is His mission to restore to earth and heaven the peace that sin has broken. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1. Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace. {MB 27.2}

There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife. {MB 27.3}

Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. "He healeth

the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son. {SC 100.1}

It is when we come into difficult places that He reveals His power and wisdom in answer to humble prayer. Have confidence in Him as a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God. He will reveal Himself to you as One who can help in every emergency. He who created man, who gave him his wonderful physical, mental, and spiritual faculties, will not withhold that which is necessary to sustain the life He has given. He who has given us His word—the leaves of the tree of life—will not withhold from us a knowledge of how to provide food for His needy children. {MH 199.4}

Jesus says, “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” The peace spoken of by the great Teacher is larger and fuller than we have imagined. Christ is ready to do large things for us, to restore our natures by making us partakers of His divine nature. He waits to link our hearts with His heart of infinite love, in order that we may be fully reconciled to God; but it is our privilege to understand that God loves us as He loves His Son. When we believe in Christ as our personal Saviour, the peace of Christ is ours. . . . Entering into communion with our Saviour, we enter the region of peace. {LHU 332.2}

When we receive Christ as an abiding guest in the soul, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. {MB 15.2}

In the place where sin abounded, God’s grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed but exalted. Our little world, under the curse of sin the one dark blot in His glorious creation, will be honored above all other worlds in the universe of God. Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity; where the King of glory lived and suffered and died,—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men, “and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.” And through endless ages as the redeemed walk in the light of the Lord, they will praise Him for His unspeakable Gift,—Immanuel, “God with us.” {DA 26.3}

It is no part of Christ’s mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, who seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederated with evil angels sometimes bring suffering upon their fellow men in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. {AA 541.1}

But even this parable [the prodigal son], tender and touching as it is, comes short of expressing the infinite compassion of the heavenly Father. The Lord declares by His prophet, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: *therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*" Jeremiah 31:3. While the sinner is yet far from the Father's house, wasting his substance in a strange country, the Father's heart is yearning over him; and every longing awakened in the soul to return to God is but the tender pleading of His Spirit, wooing, entreating, drawing the wanderer to his Father's heart of love. {SC 54.1}

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. He had declared that the principles of God's government make forgiveness impossible. Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved true. He was ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. Though corruption and defiance might be seen in every part of the alien province, a way for its recovery was provided. At the very crisis, when Satan seemed about to triumph, the Son of God came with the embassy of divine grace. Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled. {DA 37.2}

Jesus presented the Father as one to whom we could give our confidence and present our wants. When we are in terror of God, and overwhelmed with the thought of His glory and majesty, the Father points us to Christ as His representative. What you see revealed in Jesus, of tenderness, compassion, and love, is the reflection of the attributes of the Father. The cross of Calvary reveals to man the love of God. Christ represents the Sovereign of the universe as a God of love. By the mouth of the prophet He said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3). {HP 18.3}

In the person of Christ we behold the eternal God engaged in an enterprise of boundless mercy toward fallen man. {FLB 98.3}

Christ came to this world to show that by receiving power from on high, man can live an unsullied life. . . . {FLB 98.4}

He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul. . . . He sought to inspire with hope the roughest and most unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them manifest as the children of God. {FLB 98.6}

If in our ignorance we make missteps, the Saviour does not forsake us. We need never feel that we are alone. Angels are our companions. The Comforter that Christ promised to send in His name abides with us. In the way that leads to the City of God there are no difficulties which those who trust in Him may not overcome. There are no dangers which they may not escape. There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy. {MH 249.1}

None need abandon themselves to discouragement and despair. Satan may come to you with the cruel suggestion, "Yours is a hopeless case. You are irredeemable." But there is hope for you in Christ. God does not bid us overcome in our own strength. He asks us to come close to His side. Whatever difficulties we labor under, which weigh down soul and body, He waits to make us free. {MH 249.2}

It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. {DA 487.3}

Infinite love—how great it is! God made the world to enlarge heaven. He desires a larger family of created intelligences (MS 78, 1901). {1BC 1081.2}

All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made "in the image of God," and it was the Creator's design that they should populate the earth (RH Feb. 11, 1902). {1BC 1081.3}

Next to the angelic beings, the human family, formed in the image of God, are the noblest of His created works. God desires them to become all that He has made it possible for them to be, and to do their very best with the powers He has given them. {MH 397.1}

God created man a superior being; he alone is formed in the image of God, and is capable of partaking of the divine nature, of cooperating with his Creator and executing His plans. {SD 7.4}

God is able and willing to bestow upon His servants all the strength they need and to give them the wisdom that their varied necessities demand. He will more than fulfill the highest expectations of those who put their trust in Him. {AA 242.1}

The subtlety of Satan will not decrease, but the wisdom given to men through a living connection with the Source of all light and divine knowledge will be proportionate to his arts and wiles. {FLB 312.6}