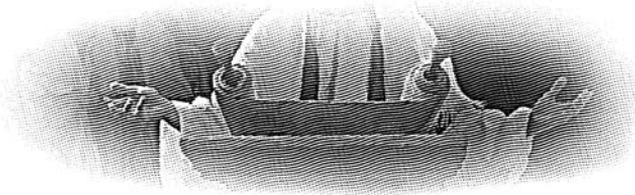


Jesus and the Apostles’ View of the Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 4:1–11; Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45; Luke 4:25–27; Acts 4:24–26.*

Memory Text: “But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matthew 4:4, NKJV*).

Unfortunately in this postmodern age, the Bible has been largely reinterpreted through the lens of a philosophy that questions both its inspiration and its authority. In fact, the Bible is seen as merely the ideas of human beings living in a relatively primitive culture who couldn’t possibly understand the world as we do today. At the same time, the supernatural element has been either downplayed or even removed from the picture, turning the Bible into a document that, instead of being God’s view of humanity, has become humanity’s view of God. And the result is that, for many, the Bible has become largely irrelevant in an age of Darwinian thinking and modern philosophy.

However, we completely reject that position. Instead, in the New Testament, we can see the inspired way to view the entire Scripture by studying how Jesus and the apostles understood the Old Testament, the only Bible that they had at that time. How did they relate to the people, places, and events described? What were their assumptions and subsequent methods of interpretation? Let’s follow them and their understanding, in contrast to the misconceptions of uninspired humans whose assumptions lead only to skepticism and doubt about the Word of God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

It Is Written

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist marked the beginning of the Savior's ministry, following which Jesus was led by the Spirit into the Judean wilderness, where—in His weakest human condition—He was tempted by Satan.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. How does Jesus defend Himself against Satan's temptations in the wilderness? What should we learn about the Bible from this account?

When tempted by appetite, Jesus responds: “ ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, NKJV*). Jesus points back to the living Word and its ultimate, divine source. In this way, He affirms the authority of Scripture. When tempted with the world's kingdoms and glory, Jesus responds, “ ‘It is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only you shall serve” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:10, Luke 4:8, NKJV*). Christ reminds us that true worship is focused on God and not on anyone else, and that submission to His Word is true worship. Finally, with the temptation on the love of display and on presumption, Jesus responds, “ ‘It is written again, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:7, NKJV; also Luke 4:12*).

In all three temptations, Jesus responds with the words “It is written.” That is, Jesus goes right to the Word of God and nothing else to deal with the attacks and deceptions of Satan. This should be a powerful lesson to all of us: the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the ultimate standard and foundation of our belief.

Yes, the Bible and the Bible alone was Jesus' method of defense against the attacks of the adversary. Jesus is God, but in His defense against Satan He submits Himself solely to the Word of God.

It is not opinion; it is not an elaborate, convoluted argument; it is not with words of personal animosity; it is instead by the simple yet profound words of Scripture. For Christ, Scripture has the greatest authority and the greatest power. In this way, His ministry begins with a certain foundation and continues to build upon the trustworthiness of the Bible.

How can we learn to be just as reliant on the Word of God, and as submissive to it?

Jesus and the Law

Read Matthew 5:17–20; Matthew 22:29; and Matthew 23:2, 3. What is Jesus saying in these contexts?

Jesus taught His disciples obedience to the Word of God and the law. There is never a hint of Him doubting the authority or relevance of Scripture. On the contrary, He constantly referred to it as the source of divine authority. And to the Sadducees He said, “ ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God’ ” (*Matt. 22:29, RSV*). Jesus taught that a mere intellectual knowledge of the Bible and its teachings was insufficient for knowing truth and, more important, for knowing the Lord, who is that truth.

What does Matthew 22:37–40 tell us about Jesus’ view of the law of Moses?

In this statement to the lawyer, Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments, given to Moses nearly 1,500 years earlier. It should be recognized how Jesus focuses on the Old Testament law and elevates it to the highest level. Many Christians incorrectly have concluded that here a new commandment is given, and thus somehow the Old Testament law is now replaced by the New Testament gospel. But the fact is that what Jesus is teaching is based on the Old Testament law. Christ had unveiled and revealed the law more fully so that “ ‘on these two commandments’ ” (summarizing the Ten Commandments, the first four of which focus on the human-divine relationship, and the second six of which focus on human interpersonal relationships) “ ‘depend all the law and the prophets’ ” (*Matt. 22:40, RSV*). In this way, Jesus also uplifts the entire Old Testament when He says, “the law and the prophets,” for this is a shortened way of referring to the law, prophets, and writings, or all three divisions of the Old Testament.

“He [Christ] pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 39, 40.

What (if any) competitive sources of authority (family, philosophy, culture) might be pitted against your submission to the Word of God?

Jesus and All Scripture

Read Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45. How does Jesus use the Scriptures to teach the disciples the gospel message?

After the death of Christ, His followers were confused and in doubt. How could this have happened? What did it mean? In this chapter of Luke, we see that Jesus appears to them twice, first to two who are on the road to Emmaus, and then to others later. On two separate occasions, Jesus explains how all has been fulfilled from the Old Testament prophecies: “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (*Luke 24:27, RSV*).

Again in Luke 24:44, 45, He says, “ ‘These are my words . . . that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’ ” (*RSV*). Jesus then “opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (*RSV*).

Note the specific reference in Luke 24:27 to “all the scriptures.” This is reemphasized in the second passage as the “ ‘law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms’ ” (*Luke 24:44, RSV*). This establishes clearly that Jesus, the Word made flesh (*John 1:1–3, 14*), relies on the authority of Scripture to explain how these things were foretold hundreds of years earlier. By referring to the totality of Scripture, Jesus is teaching the disciples by example. As they go forth to spread the gospel message, they, too, were to expound all Scripture to bring understanding and power to the new converts throughout the world.

Notice, too, how in Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus says to His disciples then (and to us today) that “ ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ ” (*RSV*). But that authority remains rooted in His Father and the entire Godhead, for He says to them, “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ ” (*RSV*). Then comes the key passage: “ ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ ” (*RSV*). What does Jesus teach and command? His teachings are based on all of Scripture. It is upon the prophetic authority of the Word that He came, and it is in fulfillment of the prophecies in Scripture that He submitted to His Father.

If Jesus accepts all of Scripture, why must we do the same? Again, how can we learn to accept the authority of all Scripture, even when we realize that not everything is still necessarily applicable to us today? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Jesus and the Origin and History of the Bible

Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God in the sense that what it says is synonymous with what God says. Its origin is found in God and, therefore, contains ultimate authority for every aspect of life. God worked through history to reveal His will to humanity through the Bible.

For instance, in Matthew 19:4, 5 (*NKJV*), *Jesus* refers to a quote written by Moses. But Jesus takes this passage and says, “ ‘He who made them at the beginning . . . said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother.” ’ ” Instead of saying “Scripture says,” Jesus says, “ ‘He who made them at the beginning . . . said,’ ” attributing to the Creator’s Word what the narrator of Genesis wrote. God is, in fact, regarded here as the author of this statement, even though it was written by Moses.

Read the following passages. How did Jesus understand the historical persons and events of the Bible?

Matt. 12:3, 4 _____

Mark 10:6–8 _____

Luke 4:25–27 _____

Luke 11:51 _____

Matt. 24:38 _____

Jesus consistently treats Old Testament people, places, and events as historical truth. He refers to Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, Abel in Genesis 4, David eating the showbread, and Elisha among other historical figures. He repeatedly speaks of the sufferings of the prophets of old (*Matt. 5:12, Matt. 13:57, Matt. 23:34–36, Mark 6:4*). In a message of warning, Jesus also describes the days of Noah: “ ‘They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be’ ” (*Matt. 24:38, 39, NKJV*). There is every indication that Jesus was referring to this mighty act of God’s judgment as a historical event.

Because Jesus Himself refers to these historical people as real, what does it say about the power of Satan’s deceptions that many people today, even professed Christians, often deny their existence? Why must we never fall into that trap?

The Apostles and the Bible

The New Testament writers approach the Bible the same way that Jesus does. In matters of doctrine, ethics, and prophetic fulfillment, the Old Testament for them was the authoritative Word of God. We find nothing, anywhere, in what these men say or do that challenges either the authority or authenticity of any part of the Bible.

What do these passages below teach us about how the apostles understood the authority of God’s Word?

Acts 4:24–26 _____

Acts 13:32–36 _____

Rom. 9:17 _____

Gal. 3:8 _____

Notice in these passages how closely related the Scriptures are to the voice of God Himself. In Acts 4, just before being filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples praise God for the deliverance of Peter and John. In their praise, they raise their voices, acknowledging God as the Creator and for speaking through David His servant. That is, David’s words are God’s words. In Acts 13:32–36, David is quoted again by Paul, but his words are attributed to God, for verse 32 says: “What God promised to the fathers” (*RSV*).

In Romans 9:17, where one would expect God as the subject, Paul uses the term “Scripture,” saying: “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh” (*NKJV*), which could actually be stated, “For God says to the Pharaoh.” In Galatians 3:8 the subject “Scripture” is used in place of “God,” showing just how closely tied the Word of God is to God Himself.

In fact, the New Testament writers uniformly rely on the Old Testament as the Word of God. There are hundreds of quotes in the New Testament from the Old Testament. One scholar has compiled a list of 2,688 specific references: 400 from Isaiah, 370 from the Psalms, 220 from Exodus, and so on. If one were to add to this list allusions, themes, and motifs, the number would greatly increase. The books are replete with references to the Old Testament prophecies that are often introduced with the phrase, “it is written” (*Matt. 2:5, Mark 1:2, Mark 7:6, Luke 2:23, Luke 3:4, Rom. 3:4, Rom. 8:36, Rom. 9:33, 1 Cor. 1:19, Gal. 4:27, 1 Pet. 1:16*). All of this confirms that the Old Testament Scriptures are the foundation upon which the teachings of Jesus and the apostles rest.

What should these examples teach us about how dangerous any ideas are that would lessen our trust in the authority of the Scriptures?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “As a Child,” pp. 68–74, and “The Temptation,” pp. 114–123, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Men consider themselves wiser than the word of God, wiser even than God; and instead of planting their feet on the immovable foundation, and bringing everything to the test of God’s word, they test that word by their own ideas of science and nature, and if it seems not to agree with their scientific ideas, it is discarded as unworthy of credence.”
—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 27, 1884, p. 1.

“Those who become best acquainted with the wisdom and purpose of God as revealed in His word, become men and women of mental strength; and they may become efficient workers with the great Educator, Jesus Christ. . . . Christ has given His people the words of truth, and all are called to act a part in making them known to the world. . . . There is no sanctification aside from the truth, the word. Then how essential that it should be understood by every one!”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 432.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If Jesus, the Gospel writers, and Paul treated the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God, what should this tell us about why many of the modern views of Scripture today are wrong and why we should not fall for these arguments, no matter who teaches them?
- 2 Just to give people an idea of where many modern biblical scholars have gone with their skepticism, here are a few things that many modern scholars deny. They reject a literal six-day Creation, accepting billions of years of evolution instead. They reject a sinless Adam in an unfallen world. They reject a universal worldwide flood. Some reject the literal existence of Abraham. Some reject the story of the Exodus. Some reject the miracles of Jesus, including even His bodily resurrection. Some reject the idea of predictive prophecy, in which prophets tell the future, sometimes centuries or even millennia in advance. What should these conclusions tell us about what happens when people start doubting the authority and authenticity of Scripture? Also, what are ways to try to help such people come to a clear understanding of truth?
- 3 In response to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, how do we understand how all Scripture can be inspired, even the parts that are not necessarily applicable to us today?

Key Texts: *Matt. 4:1–11; Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 24:13–35, 44, 45; Luke 4:25–27; Acts 4:24–26.*

Part I: Overview

The cry of the Reformation was *ad fontes*—“back to the sources.” In the context of the Enlightenment, this motto meant that the Reformers decided to go back to Scripture as the original source in order truly to understand the nature of Christianity and the duties of a Christian. The Reformers rejected basing their understanding of Scripture on the traditions and abuses that had come to characterize the medieval church. Today, modern presuppositions that come from a secular worldview minimize the Bible and assume it is based on misguided and primitive ideas that need either to be adjusted or rejected. Thus, Christians also must “go back to the sources.” The primary example by which we should orient ourselves is Jesus Christ. How did He view the Scriptures? Did He express doubt about certain parts of scripture? Or did He instead quote from the Bible (the Old Testament in His time) as authoritative for all areas of life? This modern, scientific age denies the existence of God. At most, it claims that God does not interact with human history. Rather than follow these presuppositions, should we not test any such claim by what Scripture says that Jesus taught and, by example, believed? What about His disciples, the apostles, who wrote large portions of the New Testament? Did they not also follow His example? This week we are going back to Jesus and the apostles to see how they used and interpreted Scripture. We posit that their methods of interpretation and application still serve as a reliable guide and inspiration for us today.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

In 1521, Martin Luther was summoned by the Roman emperor to Worms, Germany, where he awaited trial by the council, or Diet. It was a turning point for the Reformation. Was Luther going to recant and repudiate his writings that had stirred all of Europe? Or would he uphold *sola Scriptura*, “the Bible alone,” as his standard? Luther stood before the emperor and the highest civil and ecclesiastical authorities. An etching from the artist Lucas Cranach that same year presents the clear-cut profile of Luther projecting strength and determination. When the

moment came, he spoke in a straightforward manner and with honesty: “ ‘Inasmuch as Your Majesty and Your Highnesses ask for a plain answer, I shall give one. . . . Unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scriptures and by evident reasoning—for I cannot trust the decisions of either popes or councils, since it is plain that they have frequently erred and contradicted one another—I am bound in conscience and held fast in the Word of God by those passages of the Holy Scriptures which I have quoted. Therefore, I cannot and will not retract anything, for it is neither safe nor salutary to act against one’s conscience. . . . God help me! Amen.’ ”—Heinrich Boehmer, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 415.

Scripture

A pivotal moment in earth’s history came when Satan tempted Jesus after His baptism and wilderness experience. Just 40 days earlier, the Father said at Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (*Matt. 3:17*). Satan now challenged this position. Was Jesus who His Father said He was? The issue was the reliability of God’s Word. In His first response, Jesus quotes a passage from Deuteronomy 8:3: “ ‘That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (*NKJV*). The context of this passage is God’s sustaining providence to ancient Israel when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. God humbled them and sustained them so that they would rely wholly on Him. By quoting this Scripture, Jesus is saying, “My Father who sustained Israel for 40 years will sustain Me. I trust in His Word alone because I know that He is not only the Source of sustenance, but the Source of life itself.” There also is a deeper implication here. Jesus is submitting Himself to His Father, just as ancient Israel was taught to submit to the Word of God. Jesus speaks not of His own authority but from the authority of Scripture as spoken by Moses. The argument in Deuteronomy is that because God sustained Israel and preserved them as His people to enter the Promised Land, they “shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him” (*Deut. 8:6, NKJV*).

“Jesus met Satan with the words of Scripture. ‘It is written,’ He said. In every temptation the weapon of His warfare was the word of God. Satan demanded of Christ a miracle as a sign of His divinity. But that which is greater than all miracles, a firm reliance upon a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ was a sign that could not be controverted. So long as Christ held to this position, the tempter could gain no advantage.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120. How do we approach temptation

today? Do we have Scripture hidden in our hearts that we may call upon in order to respond to the tempter? We are never forced to submit our wills to temptation, and we have the same resource as Jesus did—His Word.

Illustration

On October 23, 1844, there was intense grief and disappointment when the Advent believers woke up to the reality that Jesus had not returned to take them home as they had expected. They had sold homes and property. They had given everything for the proclamation of the news that Jesus was coming that day. Now their greatest hope was crushed. Some of the believers left the faith. Many faced the ridicule of skeptics who had doubted all along. What had gone wrong? Was everything that they learned from the study of the prophecies for nothing? But as they went back to Scripture, they were led to understand that the date was not wrong; rather, they had misunderstood the nature of the “cleansing of the sanctuary.” The cleansing of the sanctuary was not the destruction of the earth; it was the movement of Christ into the Most Holy Place to begin another phase of His atoning work. Study led the Advent believers to understand the prophecy of Revelation 10:9, 10—the sweet message of the book that became a bitter disappointment. This disappointment was not a new experience for the believers in Jesus. It had happened before.

Scripture

The disciples could not understand Christ’s death on the cross. They had believed with the rest of Judaism that the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom that would free them from the oppression of the Romans. Now that Jesus was dead and buried, they were devastated. The answer to their disappointment was the same as the answer to the early Advent believers. It was to turn back to Scripture. Jesus showed them the way. “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (*Luke 24:27, RSV*). This was a thorough exposition so that the disciples could see that everything written about Him “ ‘in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’ ” (*Luke 24:44, RSV*). Here we have another explicit reference to the three divisions of the Old Testament as encompassing “all scripture.” Jesus had prayed for His disciples, “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*). For Jesus, all Scripture was authoritative and the basis for His authority, ministry, and mission.

The disciples took the teaching of Jesus to heart and made it the core

of the gospels and letters to the church. Matthew quoted extensively from the prophecies of the Old Testament. Luke began his Gospel with the genealogies, demonstrating that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul affirms that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV). In Hebrews 11, Paul lists many of the men and women who were heroes of the faith, doing so in a way that takes their stories and original settings in the Old Testament at face value. Never do we find any New Testament writer doubting the authenticity, historicity, prophecies, or teachings of the Bible. They do not view the Scripture accounts in any way other than as authoritative. The examples of Jesus and the apostles give us the clearest evidence of how to approach the Scriptures. They allowed Scripture to interpret Scripture. They relied on Scripture as their defense during temptation and required a clear “thus saith the Lord” in the plainest understanding of the biblical text and its applications.

Part III: Life Application

In the 1990s, the WWJD movement became popular among Christians. Young people wore plastic bracelets with the acronym WWJD, for “What Would Jesus Do?” This question also might be appropriate when we contemplate the question of how to approach the Bible. We might rephrase the acronym to WWJS, or “What would Jesus say?” What would Jesus say about modern interpretations that deny the historicity of major events in the Old Testament? What would Jesus say about arguments in favor of the belief that the Old Testament teaches a message different from the New Testament and should be minimized and relegated to a position of lesser authority? What would Jesus say to someone in the church who insists that certain passages of the New Testament are only applicable to the church (e.g., Ephesus or Corinth) to which a particular letter was addressed? Would Jesus limit the authority of the Bible? As Christ’s disciples, how do we emulate His approach to Scripture? Will we try to interpret and twist words as the Pharisees and Sadducees did to trap Jesus?

1. **Ask your class to recount experiences in which certain Scriptures came to mind when they were tempted to leave the side of Jesus. What kind of blessings do we receive from memorizing the Bible and storing it in our hearts? How many promises of God have you stored for a time when the Bible may not be in your possession any longer?**

2. Think of other examples of when Jesus and the apostles based their arguments on Scripture. How effective were such arguments?

Notes