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# Bible Study

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## Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods



(Paraphrase for Readability)

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## Section 1

# Preamble

We believe it to be helpful to set forth principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings of the Scripture, that preserve their unity, and are based on the premise that the Bible is the Word of God.

Such an approach will lead to a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.

## Section 2

# Claims of Scripture

## Origin

1. The Bible is the Word of God and is the primary means by which He reveals Himself to human beings.
2. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words.

Therefore, Scripture is an indivisible union of human and divine elements. Neither should neglect of the other.

3. All Scripture is inspired by God and came through the work of the Holy Spirit.

However, it did not occur in a continuous chain of revelations. As the Holy Spirit communicated truth to the Bible writer, each wrote as he was moved, and emphasized the truth he was led to stress.

The Bible student will gain a rounded comprehension on any subject by recognizing that the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied in totality, it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth.

4. The Bible transcends cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.

## Authority

1. The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible revelation of God's will and His salvation.  
The Bible is the Word of God. It alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

2. Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history, and God's acts in history.

The supernatural acts revealed are historically true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of events.

3. The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human.

- Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history.
- While there are parallel procedures employed by Bible, the techniques based on human presuppositions and focused on the human element are inadequate for interpretation.
- Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of the Scriptures can avoid a distortion of its message.

4. Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it.

- Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them.
- God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.

5. The revelation of God in nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the written Word and is to be interpreted in that light.

## Section 3

# Interpretation of Scripture

A. The Spirit enables the believer to accept, understand, and apply the Bible to one's life.

- The believer can render obedience and appropriate all Bible promises.
- Only those following the light received can hope to receive further illumination of the Spirit.

B. Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit enables the believer to understand and apply Scripture.
- Study should start with a request for the Spirit's guidance and illumination.

- C. Come to the study of the Word with faith and with the humble spirit of a learner seeking to truth.
- Be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions, and conclusions of reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself.
  - Come directly to the Word and understand the essentials of salvation apart from any human explanations.
  - The biblical message becomes meaningful to such a person.
- D. Investigate Scripture with sincere desire to discover and obey God's will rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.

## Section 4

# Methods of Bible Study

- A. Select a Bible version that is faithful to the meaning the original language. Give preference to translations done by a broad group of scholars.
- B. Choose a definite plan of study. Avoid haphazard and aimless approaches.

### Study Plans Suggestions:

- Book-by-book analysis
  - Verse-by-verse method
  - Seeks a biblical solution to a specific life problem
  - Topical (e.g. faith, love, second coming, and others)
  - Word study
  - Biographical study
- C. Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the passage.
- D. Seek the underlying major themes drawn from the totality of Scripture, not imposed on it.
- Two basic themes run throughout Scripture:
    1. The person and work of Jesus Christ
    2. The great controversy involving:
      - a. the authority of God's Word,
      - b. the fall of man,
      - c. the first and second advents of Christ,

- d. the exoneration of God and His law,
- e. the restoration of the divine plan for the universe.

E. The Bible is its own interpreter.

\*The meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.

F. Study the context of the passage by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire Bible book.

G. Try to ascertain the historical circumstances in the passage.

H. Determine the literary type the author is using:

- \* Parables
- \* Proverbs
- \* Allegories
- \* Psalms
- \* Prophecies

- Since many biblical writers presented much of their material as poetry, use a version of the Bible that presents this material in poetic style.
- Passages employing imagery are not to be interpreted in the same manner as prose.

I. Recognize that a biblical text may not conform in every detail to present-day literary categories. Be cautious not to force these categories in interpreting the meaning.

\*It is human tendency to find what one is looking for, even when the author did not intend such.

J. Take note of grammar and sentence construction to discover the author's meaning.

- Study key words of passage by comparing their use in other parts of the Bible.
- Use a concordance, biblical lexicons, and dictionaries.

K. Explore historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning.

L. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White.

\*Her expositions offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (i.e. critical explanation or interpretation.)

M. After studying as outlined above:

- use commentaries & secondary sources to see how others dealt with passages.
- carefully evaluate the viewpoints from the totality of Scripture.

N. In interpreting prophecy keep in mind:

1. The Bible claims God's power to predict the future.
2. Prophecy has a moral purpose
  - to strengthen faith, promote holy living & readiness for the Advent.
  - it was not written to satisfy curiosity about the future.
3. The focus of prophecy is on Christ (both His first and second advents), the church, and the end-time.
4. The norms for interpreting prophecy are found within the Bible itself:
  - The Bible notes time prophecies and their historical fulfillments.
  - The NT cites specific fulfillments of OT prophecies about the Messiah
  - Old Testament presents individuals and events as types of the Messiah.
5. In New Testament application of Old Testament prophecies, some literal names become spiritual. For example, Israel represents the church, Babylon apostate religion, etc.
6. There are two general types of prophetic writings:
  - a. non-apocalyptic (e.g. Isaiah and Jeremiah)
    - characteristics
      - addresses God's people
      - conditional in nature (sets forth alternative blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.
      - leaps from local crisis to end-time day of the Lord
      - time prophecies phrased in long terms:
        - \* 400 years of Israel's servitude
        - \* 70 years of Babylonian captivity
  - b. apocalyptic (e.g. Daniel and the Revelation)
    - characteristics:
      - prophecy is universal in scope
      - emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His control over history
      - time prophecies phrases in short terms
        - \* 100 days
        - \* 42 months
        - \* time periods symbolic of longer periods of actual time.

7. Apocalyptic prophecy is symbolic and should be interpreted accordingly.

\*In interpreting symbols:

- a. Look for interpretations (explicit or implicit) within the passage.
- b. Look for interpretations elsewhere in the book or other writings by the same author.
- c. Using a concordance, study the use of symbols in other parts of Scripture.
- d. A study of ancient Near Eastern documents may shed light on the meaning of symbols, although scriptural use may alter those meanings.

8. The literary structure aids interpretation.

\*The parallel nature Daniel's prophecies is an example.

O. Parallel accounts may present differences in detail and emphasis.

- Examine passages carefully to ensure that parallels refer to the same historical event.
  - \* Many of Jesus' parables have been given on different occasions to different audiences and with different wording.
- Where there appear to be differences in parallel accounts, recognize that the total message of the Bible is the synthesis of all its parts.
  - Each book or writer communicates what the Spirit has led him to write.
  - Each makes his own special contribution to the richness, diversity, and variety of Scripture.
  - The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of divine self-disclosure.
- When parallel passages seem to indicate contradiction, look for the underlying harmony.
  - Dissimilarities may be due to minor errors of copyists,, differing emphases for different audiences under different circumstances.
  - Reconciling minor dissimilarities in detail may be irrelevant to the central message of the passage.
  - Judgment may have to be suspended until information and better evidence is available to resolve a seeming discrepancy.



P. Scripture reveals the will of God to the human family.

- It is important to recognize that statements were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns.

- Expressions such as:

- "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh"
- "an evil spirit from God..."
- the imprecatory (judgment or curses) psalms,
- "three days and three nights" of Jonah compared with Christ's death

\*These are often misunderstood because of the different viewpoint.

- A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is indispensable for understanding such expressions.

\*For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen.

- Inspired writers commonly credit God with "doing something" actively.

\*Today we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening (e.g. hardening of Pharaoh's heart.)

- Another troubling aspect is the divine command to Israel to engage in war and execute entire nations.

- Israel was organized as a theocracy, a civil government through which God ruled directly. Such a theocratic state was unique.
- This type government no longer exists and cannot be regarded as a direct model for Christian practice.
- God accepted persons who were not in complete harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible. We may cite incidents like the use of alcohol, polygamy, divorce, and slavery.
  - Although ingrained social customs were not explicitly condemned, God did not endorse all. He bore with the lives of the patriarchs and Israel. Jesus made this clear regarding divorce.
  - The spirit of the Scriptures is restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity to the divine ideal. Consequently, we must not accept as models the actions of sinful men recorded in the Bible.

- The Scriptures unfold God's revelation to man. For example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount enlarges and expands Old Testament concepts.
- Christ is the ultimate revelation of God's character to humanity.
- There is unity in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God chose to reveal Himself through humans to meet them in spiritual and intellectual endowments.
- God does not change. He progressively unfolded His revelation as men could grasp it.
  - › Although divinely inspired, not every statement or experience is normative for Christian behavior today.
  - › Both the spirit and the letter of Scripture must be understood.
  - › Timeless principles are applied to every age and culture.

Q. The goal is to make application of the text. Ask questions:

1. What is the message God intends to convey?
2. What meaning does this text have for me?
3. How does it apply to my situation and circumstances?"

## Section 5

# Conclusion

In the introduction of *The Great Controversy* Ellen G. White writes:

The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Those unaccepting of Christ's divinity cannot accept the purpose of His incarnation. It's impossible to use the Bible merely as a human book to understand its message regardless of how careful and rigorous the methods.

Christian scholars accepting the divine-human nature of Scripture, but use methodological approaches dwelling mostly on human aspects risk emptying the biblical message of its power.

The medium and message are inseparable. The medium without the message is an empty shell unable to express vital spiritual needs of humankind.

The committed Bible student will use methods that fully justify the dual, inseparable nature of Scripture. He will enhance understanding, apply the message, and strengthen faith.