

PART II

The Voice of Scripture

Principles of Interpretation

We believe that Scripture is its own interpreter. However, to understand that interpretation. Scripture must be studied as a whole, bringing together all passages that bear upon a given topic. As we seek truth from the totality of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God will help us see the perfect pattern of Scripture.

Seventh-day Adventists have long recognized the need to understand obscure passages in light of those that show God's truth plainly. We teach that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, for instance, must be understood in light of the clear instructions in the Scriptures concerning death and resurrection (Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Luke 16:19-31; John 11:11-14; 1 Cor. 15:51-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-16).

In the same way the few scattered texts that appear to restrict the full participation of women in the life and ministry of the church (1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:9-15) must not be interpreted in contradiction to the rest of Scripture. We must interpret them from the complete teaching of Scripture and their total context.

Seventh-day Adventists have never taken these texts simplistically, in isolation from the rest of Scripture. To have done so would have negated the public, pulpit, authoritative calling of Ellen White, just as today it would eliminate women from any medical, teaching, or leadership role.

CHAPTER 3

A Guide to Reliable Interpretation: *Determining the Meaning of Scripture*

by Raymond R Cottrell

If thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; . . . If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shall thou understand . . . and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1, 2, 4, 5).

The Bible is the most remarkable literary document of all time. It has influenced the thinking and lives of more people than any other book. And it continues to attract the careful study of a broad spectrum of readers, from persons barely literate to learned scholars, and from people who consider it a strictly human product to others who are profoundly committed to it as the inspired Word of God.

No other literary document has attracted such universal attention or been understood in so many ways. The variety of Christian denominations gives evidence of this. Why is such an important and influential piece of literature understood so differently by so many people? Is the Bible a sort of Delphic oracle that can mean anything a person wants it to mean? No, the Bible writers addressed explicit messages to particular people in specific historical circumstances. People interpret the Bible in differing ways because of their prior assumptions as well as the procedures they follow when they read it. Identifying these principles and procedures is the objective of this chapter.

The Bible is sometimes read primarily as literature. Books such as Ruth, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon have long been considered masterpieces of prose and poetry. Scripture is also read for inspiration, or consolation. It is admired for its lofty moral and ethical principles as well as for its instruction about personal conduct and human relations. More than all of these, however, the Bible can serve as a guide to salvation in Jesus Christ, and a manual for establishing a personal relationship with Him in anticipation of life eternal.

For these modes of Bible reading, no special training is necessary. But for Bible study on the research level, which seeks to recover the exact meaning of the inspired writers, a reliable hermeneutic, or method of interpretation, is essential. This chapter thus proceeds with a study of the following:

- Requirements for research-level Bible study.
- Aspects of the Bible a reliable hermeneutic must consider.
- A summary of hermeneutical principles and procedures.
- Ellen G. White and biblical exegesis.
- Ways of interpreting Scripture.
- Four examples of defective biblical hermeneutics.
- The hermeneutical dimension of women's ordination.

Requirements for Research-Level Bible Study

To understand the Bible, one must first have a disciplined and informed mind. The essential qualities of such a mind are noted and

discussed below.

An openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance. According to 2 Peter 1:21, the Bible writers were "moved by the Holy Ghost" in order to safeguard the transmission of what was revealed to them, and their record of it. The ability to communicate that information to potential readers requires the Holy Spirit, just as did the revelatory process and the writing.

A mind open to objective evidence. Humility and willingness to learn are essential to understanding biblical truth. How one views the process of inspiration, evaluates the inspired data, and forms conclusions about the data must be in harmony with the Bible's own statements, objectively understood, and as illustrated by the Bible writers themselves. Otherwise, presuppositions and prideful opinion will contaminate and invalidate the interpretive process.

An acceptance of revealed truth. Revealed truth becomes fully understood only when it is experienced and integrated into a person's thought processes and lifestyle.

A dedication to the pursuit of truth. One must search carefully for all of the relevant evidence in order to correctly understand what the Bible has to say on a particular point. Randomly gathering superficial and incomplete evidence will not lead one to an accurate understanding of the Bible.

Objectivity. Ultimate truth is objective. It exists outside the human mind and is not affected by what a person thinks about it. This means that the pursuit and understanding of truth require objectivity. It is, of course, not possible to be completely free of bias.

Presuppositions. Objectivity also requires a person to be aware of his or her presuppositions, the basic premises that tend to guide and control how one evaluates evidence and forms conclusions. These presuppositions must remain open to revision if one finds convincing evidence.

A reliable reasoning process. Dependable analysis requires that one be alert to possible flaws in the reasoning process: embracing data that seem to confirm one's presuppositions but ignoring data that do not, generalizing on the basis of insufficient evidence, allowing presuppositions to control how one evaluates

the evidence, drawing conclusions that are not supported by evidence, and trying to deal with passages or problems that are beyond one's competence.

Required skills. Research-level Bible study that seeks to identify a Bible writer's precise meaning requires a working knowledge of the language in which he wrote and of ancient biblical manuscripts. One should also study archaeology to learn about the historical and cultural background of the writer's time.

Cooperation in the quest for truth. Respect for the competence and endeavors of other seekers for truth, responsibly expressed, is important to one's own quest. The other person may have a more accurate and/or complete perception! The church's search for a more accurate understanding of the Bible must be based on the consensus of all competent Bible scholars. Deeper insights can be achieved when there is mutual respect and confidence, and no fear of reprisal for sincerely held and responsibly expressed convictions. Church administrators must provide and protect such a climate.

Aspects of the Bible That Must Be Considered

A fundamental characteristic of the Bible that often affects the interpretation of a given passage is the way divine and human factors work together in the process of revelation. To understand this requires an analysis of the Bible writers' statements and the way their writings reveal the relationship. This is crucial for accurate interpretation.

Paul spoke for each Bible writer when he said that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The prophets of old declare that "the word of the Lord" came to them.

The way in which the Bible demonstrates the human aspect of the revelatory process is less well known, however, and requires further comment.

The relationship between divine and human factors in the Bible is best understood in the person of Jesus Christ. The Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 developed the classic statement of that relationship, which has been accepted by most Christian commu-

nities, including Seventh-day Adventists. According to that creedal statement, Christ was altogether divine and altogether human. The two natures existed together in one divine-human Person, yet were distinct from each other. Furthermore, the distinction between them in the person and life of Christ can be clearly seen. To deny the completeness of either His divinity or His humanity misrepresents and belittles His integrity as Savior and Lord. Likewise, a denial of the divine/human nature of the Bible denigrates its integrity and authority.

However, it is important to distinguish between the divine and human elements in the Bible lest the divine element be confused as being human (and therefore dismissed as lacking authority for belief and practice) or the human element be confused as being divine (and thus falsely given divine authority to enforce belief and practice). Either alternative compromises the integrity of the Bible and the *sola scriptura* principle, frustrates the Bible's intended mission, invalidates exegesis based on it, and tends to alienate its readers from God and from one another.

The Bible cites many examples of historical and cultural conditioning. Of major importance is the fact that, in its own literary and historical context, the Old Testament addresses itself to ancient Israel as a nation under the covenant and as God's chosen instrument to save the world. Its view of salvation sees Israel remaining the covenant people throughout history and reaching a climax at the eschaton, with Messiah coming to die for His faithful remnant and a little later establishing His eternal reign as the Son of David, in Jerusalem. In Romans 9:4 the apostle Paul declares that "to them [ancient Israel] belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises."¹

Furthermore, the religious system of Old Testament times with its rites, regulations, and requirements was historically conditioned. The two-apartment sanctuary and later the Temple with its two-pylon entrance were designed to resemble prevailing religious architecture of the day. The divinely ordained hereditary priesthood was likewise historically conditioned. The way in which the sacrificial system pointed to the Messiah reflected the salvation history perspective at that time, as did the great religious festivals and holy days.

God's promises of national greatness to ancient Israel all depended on their cooperation with the divine purpose. When its leaders rejected the Messiah, Israel as a nation withdrew from the covenant relationship. God then set about to accomplish His infinite purpose through another covenant people, at a later time in history and under different historical circumstances than He originally intended.

The New Testament reinterprets the divine purpose with a new covenant people and a new perspective of salvation history. The fundamental principles that governed the Old Testament covenant relationship were reapplied, this time to the New Testament church; their application and requirements were historically reconditioned to the new perspective. The salvation history perspective of the New Testament anticipated the return of Christ at the close of New Testament times.²

God's message in the New testament was adapted to the historical and cultural circumstances of New Testament times, and in a number of respects the church in the New Testament is not a model for us today. For instance, Jewish and Gentile Christians were scarcely on speaking terms, and Jews would not associate with their Gentile brethren. Church organization was strictly congregational, with no conference organization of any kind. There is no record of music being used in worship services. Nearly 40 times New Testament writers anticipate the return of Jesus in their generation or soon thereafter.³ Furthermore, the apostle Paul's own practice and his explicit instructions differed from one cultural situation to another. (This will be considered at length later in this chapter.)

The Bible is also replete with evidence of accommodation to cultural influences. Three examples are considered here.

Literary forms such as poetic parallelism; apocalyptic and wisdom literature; lengthy and sometimes abbreviated or schematic genealogies; untranslatable plays on words. Then there are figures of speech such as an almond tree; a boiling pot facing north; a flying roll; a backsliding heifer; a basket of summer fruit; or a lodge in a cucumber garden. There are also idiomatic expressions such as "Abraham's bosom;" "horn of my salvation"; "soul" as a personal pronoun; *son* to designate a remote descendant or likeness

in character; *ruach* to mean both wind and the divine Spirit; and *firstborn* to designate status rather than the order of birth.⁴

The reader witnesses social customs such as trimming one's beard; carrying a paddle to cover one's excreta; divine approval of or permission for polygamy, concubines, divorce, and slavery; ratifying a covenant by walking between severed animals; giving one's shoe as a notarized receipt; an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; the right of an avenger of blood to slay a murderer; cities of refuge to escape punishment; and women covering their heads and remaining silent in church—all with divine approval!⁵

One also reads anthropomorphisms such as God being angry, jealous, repenting, taking vengeance, laughing at someone's misfortunes; authorizing military conquest and genocide; and the use of tithe to buy wine and strong drink.⁶

The list might be continued indefinitely. Without exception, throughout Bible times God addressed and applied His messages to specific historical and cultural circumstances. The *principles* in these messages are universal and eternal; the *form* was adapted to and conditioned by the circumstances of the times. A credible study must distinguish between eternal principles and their specific application under particular circumstances. Otherwise, the principles might be disregarded as human and therefore lacking in authority, or their application under specific historical-cultural circumstances might be falsely viewed as having divine authority for all time. The two alternatives are equally misleading and reprehensible.⁷

A Summary of Hermeneutical Principles and Procedures

Attention to personal qualifications and to the inherent nature of the Bible itself is a must for Bible study on the research level. Such study involves the use of specific principles and procedures in several areas. A number of them will be discussed here.

The Principle of *Sola Scriptura*

"The Bible and the Bible only" constitutes the basic principle that governs not only how one forms conclusions with respect to

doctrine, but also how one does reliable biblical exegesis (which is the only valid basis on which to formulate doctrine). The implications of *sola scriptura* for biblical exegesis are as follows:

- Insofar as possible, complete objectivity is essential to an accurate understanding of the Bible.
- The Bible means what the Spirit-inspired writers intended it to mean within the historical circumstances and from the salvation history perspective of the time when it was written.
- The *sola scriptura* principle requires an inductively-formulated concept of the revelatory process, from the explicit statements of Scripture and as demonstrated by the Bible writers.
- Presuppositions must be subject to Scripture, rather than vice versa, and must be revised as one discovers compelling information from the Bible.
- Study of Scripture in the original languages helps to define the meaning of a word, statement, or passage.
- Usage and context help in defining the meaning of words.
- Language, literary context, historical-cultural context, and salvation history perspective help Bible students to determine the meaning of a statement or passage.
- Doctrinal authority is limited to the explicit teachings of Scripture. Concepts not explicit in the Bible must not be elevated to the position of *Bible* doctrine.

Preliminaries

One should read the entire document or section to identify its context and the whole of which a particular statement or passage is a part. Who was the author? Was he speaking authoritatively for the Lord, narrating what was common knowledge, quoting someone else, or expressing his own opinion? When and under what circumstances did he write? What was his purpose? To whom did he address what he wrote? How does the particular statement under consideration relate to the whole? Is the document or section under consideration prose, poetry, narrative, didactic, apocalyptic, or

wisdom literature? Is the passage literal or figurative? Is the writer expressing an opinion of approval or disapproval?⁸

Semantical Procedures

For a casual reading of the Bible, any good translation is adequate. But to study a passage in order to determine its exact meaning, one needs to study the passage in the original language. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with a few parts in Aramaic (a late form of Hebrew). The New Testament was written in *koine* Greek, the common language of the Mediterranean world of New Testament times.

Translating any literary document from one language to another inevitably results in some loss of meaning. This is especially true of translations from an ancient to a modern language, because of the vast cultural differences, varying modes of thought, expression, and perceptions about life, reality, and the universe. Furthermore, the characteristics of these ancient languages often have an important bearing on accurate interpretation. For example, because ancient Hebrew was word-poor, many words carried a heavy semantic load of what seem to us unrelated ideas and could be understood only in context. Many Hebrew words occur only once in the entire Old Testament, and often in a context that does not clarify their meaning. The meaning of some Hebrew words is completely unknown. As a result, translation becomes guesswork on the part of the translator. (Extensive footnotes in the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and other translations attest this fact.)

The Hebrew text of Psalm 23, for instance, consists of 57 words; the King James Version translation of it, 122. The Hebrew of Job 30:22 has 6 words; the King James Version 18 and the Revised Standard Version 24! A word-for-word, literal translation often makes no sense.

To an uninitiated modern reader, an English translation may seem crystal clear. But in reality, translation problems can leave the meaning ambiguous or questionable. An accurate definition of words in the original language is therefore essential to an accurate understanding of a statement or passage. The possible meanings of

a word can be found by surveying its usage throughout the Bible. The immediate context in which it is used identifies the nuance of meaning intended in a particular statement. For instance:

- "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by *sacrifice*" (Ps. 50:5, RSV, emphasis supplied). *Sacrifice* is an accurate translation of the Hebrew *zabach*, meaning an animal sacrifice. This does not refer to sacrificial giving, as is sometimes alleged.
- "Do not think that I have come to abolish the *Law* or the Prophets" (Matt. 5:17, NIV, emphasis supplied). The Greek word *nomos* reflects the Hebrew *torah*, which means "instruction." In Hebrew usage this meant the Mosaic code of religious and civil laws—not specifically the Decalogue as is sometimes thought.
- "In the beginning God created the heaven and the *earth*" (Gen. 1:1, emphasis supplied). Usage of the Hebrew *'erets* throughout the Old Testament indicates that this refers to the visible surface of the earth, not to Earth as a planet.
- "This was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (Matt. 1:22; 2:15,17,23; etc.). Why do the passages Matthew cites give no indication of being prophetic of Christ, but in context, refer to particular incidents in Hebrew history? For instance, in Matthew 2:15, Matthew refers to the Christ child's return from Egypt as the "fulfillment" of Hosea 11:1, where Hosea refers to the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt. The Greek word *plerothe*, "fulfilled," means "filled full" and does not imply prophetic fulfillment. Writing to a Hebrew reading audience, Matthew compares certain incidents in Jesus' infancy to comparable incidents in Hebrew history that would make his account more meaningful and impressive to them. In Matthew 5:17 Christ said, "I have not come to destroy [the law or the prophets], but to *fulfil*." He then cites five Old Testament passages and adds: "Ye have heard that it was said... But I say to you ..." In each instance He "fills" the Old Testament precept more "full" of meaning—using the very same Greek word as Matthew does in 1:23 and elsewhere.

Linguistical Procedures

Ancient Hebrew and Aramaic writing used consonants only. The reader supplied whatever vowels he thought the context required. The vowel points that now appear in Hebrew Bibles were added by the Masoretes centuries later, after ancient Hebrew had become a dead language. In some instances, it is uncertain whether they selected the right vowels for a set of consonants. Different vowels could yield a different word than the writer intended. For instance, Jacob "bowed himself upon the *bed's* head" (Gen. 47:31, emphasis supplied). To the Hebrew consonants *mth*, the Masoretes added vowels to make it read *mittah*, "bed." Translators of the Septuagint eight centuries or so earlier translated *mth* to read *mattah*, "staff." Which did the writer of Genesis intend?

Grammatical Procedures

Grammar has to do with word forms and their meaning. Hebrew verbs differ radically from English verbs in their past, present, and future tenses. Instead, in Hebrew there are verb "states" such as *Qal*, *Niphal*, *Piel*, *Hiphil*, and several others. A writer projecting thought into the past might speak of a past event as incomplete (yet future). Projecting it into the future, he might speak of a future event as already completed (in the past). Often, as in 1 Samuel 15:17, the Hebrew text omits the verbs altogether, and it is not always certain whether the verbs supplied by a translator accurately reflect the intent of the writer.

Sometimes the verb form in the original is ambiguous, as in John 5:39: "*Search* the scriptures . . ." (emphasis supplied). The Greek verb form *eraunate*, "search," may be understood either as a command or as a simple statement (that the hearers *were* searching Scripture). In this case, the context implies the latter.

Then there is Daniel 9:23. In the King James Version, it reads, "*Understand* the matter, and *consider* the vision" (emphasis supplied). The New Revised Standard Version translates it, "*Consider* the word and *understand* the vision" (emphasis supplied). "Understand" and "consider" are from different forms of the same Hebrew word *bin*. The New Revised Standard Version approximates the

difference, which would be reflected more clearly as: "Consider the word and [that will enable you to] understand the vision."

Orthographical Procedures

The similarity of different letters in the ancient Hebrew alphabet often introduces uncertainty as to which word a writer intended. The Hebrew letters for *r* and *d* are almost identical. The same is true of *b* and *m*, *w* and *y*, and others. This often results in uncertainty as to the writer's intention. For instance, the difference between a *w* and a *y* in Habakkuk 2:4 makes it uncertain whether the Lord told Habakkuk, "The just shall live by *his* faith," or "by *my* faith." The difference between an *r* and a *d* in 2 Samuel 8:12 makes it uncertain whether Syria or Edom is meant. The differences between a *b* and an *m*, and a *d* and an *r* in Joshua 7:1 result in either Zabdi or Zimri.

Punctuation and Syntactical Procedures

Ancient Hebrew had no space between words. Generally speaking, however, the Hebrew equivalent of our letter *w* (*waw*) preceding the first word of a phrase or thought unit took on the meaning of "and" and served somewhat like a comma, thereby identifying the phrase as a subunit in a series of units in a longer "sentence." This is known as the *waw* consecutive. But the same *waw*, also used to mean "and," was used to couple a series of "ands" to connect sets of individual words.

A good illustration of the problems that can arise as a result occurs in Daniel 9:25: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, *and* three score and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall..." (KJV, emphasis supplied), "... from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks, and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat" (NRSV; emphasis supplied).

The KJV translators took the *waw* ("and") between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks to be copulative, that is, connecting

the seven and the sixty-two. The NRSV takes it to be a consecutive *waw* connecting the entire clause following the "and" with the entire clause preceding the "and." If the KJV were correct, Hebrew syntax would require a *waw*, "and," preceding the clause, that begins "the street shall be built again." But there is none. This is conclusive evidence that the NRSV correctly reflects the Hebrew syntax.

Syntax is also involved in an accurate understanding of Luke 23:43: "Verily I say unto thee. To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The word *semeron* ("to day") stands between the phrases "I say unto thee" and "shalt thou be with me in paradise." It could go with either clause, which makes the statement ambiguous. Determining which Luke intended depends on the translator or exegete's belief and preference.⁹

A different syntactical situation occurs in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God *bring with him*" (emphasis supplied). Verses 13 to 18 have Christ being raised from the grave and returning to raise those who "sleep in Jesus." Does God "bring [them] with him [Christ]" as He brought Christ from the grave, or does God "bring [them] with him [Christ]" from heaven? The Greek text could be translated either way. Context favors the former, and Paul's own comment in 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23 confirms this: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's *at his coming*" (emphasis supplied).

Procedures Involving Idiomatic Expressions

Frequently, biblical words and phrases are used idiomatically, and a literal translation might give a modern reader an entirely different meaning from what the writer intended. The meaning was obvious to the writer and his intended readers, but a literal translation can be misleading today. Take, for instance, Christ's prediction that "*after three days*" He would "rise again" (Mark 8:31, emphasis supplied). To us this would mean about 72 hours later, whereas according to Hebrew inclusive reckoning it could mean

as little as 26 hours later. Because they do not understand inclusive reckoning, some insist that Christ was crucified on Wednesday rather than on Friday.

Contextual Procedures

The most important factor in exegesis is the context in which a statement occurs. Every biblical statement is embedded in a context that is crucial to its meaning; no Bible statement is an island unrelated to its context. Take for example, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). This passage is commonly quoted as referring to the new earth, but the context (verses 1-8 and 10-16) makes it evident that Paul had in mind the wonderful things in God's revealed Word. The same is true of Isaiah 64:4, from which Paul was quoting.

Consider also Daniel 12:4: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." This verse is often quoted as predicting modern transportation and the information explosion. The immediate context, however, applies the statement to the unsealing of the prophecies of Daniel at the time of the end: "Shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end."

Lastly, consider Galatians 4:4: "When the fulness of the time was come. God sent forth his Son." This statement is often construed to refer to the appropriate circumstances in the Roman world for Christ's birth and ministry. The context (3:14-4:3), however, applies it to the time when God's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled (3:15-17, 23-24).

Principles Regarding Variant Manuscript Readings

As extensive footnotes in Rudolph Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* and the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* make abundantly evident, there are thousands of variant readings, both in the text and in the margins of the ancient Hebrew and Greek Bible manuscripts. The more important of these appear as footnotes or marginal readings in many English translations. Many of these

variant readings can be helpful in biblical exegesis; evaluating them, however, requires a measure of competence.

For instance, John's account of the healing of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda reports that "an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatever disease he had" (John 5:4). Does God indeed reward the person who is physically able to crowd less-able persons out of the way, and leave those most in need to languish as this man did? How different from Christ's healing all who came to Him in faith! About 40 years ago a manuscript known as Bodmer II was discovered in the Bodmer Library in Geneva. It dates from the second century A.D., decades closer to the original manuscript than any other, and the text has proved to be highly reliable. Bodmer 11 omits John 5:4 altogether, indicating that it was not part of the original.

Bodmer II also omits the words *without a cause* in Christ's statement, "But I say unto you. That whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:22, emphasis supplied). Did Christ really mean that it is all right to hate your brother or perhaps even kill him (verse 21) if you think you have sufficient reason for doing so?

Principles for Drawing Conclusions From the Evidence

Conclusions must be formulated inductively and objectively, based on the weight of evidence:

- Review and collate the evidence.
- Assess its completeness, its consensus, and its level of reliability.
- If the evidence remains inconclusive or appears to be incomplete, suspend judgment and undertake further study.
- Check for objectivity, for possible flaws in the reasoning process, and for gaps in the evidence.
- Conclusions should reflect a fair evaluation of the weight of evidence, including admission of possibly conflicting data.

Ellen G. White and Biblical Exegesis¹⁰

Consistently throughout her ministry of nearly 70 years Ellen White exalted the Bible as "the only rule of faith and doctrine."¹¹ She viewed her writings, not as an addition to or a substitute for the Bible, but as a "lesser light" to lead to the Bible as "the greater light,"¹² yet inspired by the same divine Spirit who inspired the Bible writers.¹³ Her role, she said, was that of "the Lord's messenger" to Seventh-day Adventists.¹⁴

In her writings Ellen White refers to the Bible some 47,000 times.¹⁵ An in-depth study of her use of the Bible conducted in 1973 identified 27 different ways in which she did so, all of which can be classified as either (1) comment on a Bible passage in its historical and literary context, or (2) homiletical application of a passage out of context in which she applies Bible principles as guidance for our time.¹⁶

The first of these two, though not in itself exegesis of a passage, is consistent with accurate exegesis of the meaning the Bible writer intended to convey. In the second instance, Ellen White applies the principle inherent in the passage in a way that differs from the intention of the writer. To construe this homiletical comment as exegesis—as reflecting the intent of the Bible writer—is to misuse and abuse her writings and make them appear to contradict the Bible. Ellen White was not an exegete. Nor did she consider herself one. She understood her role to be that of God's messenger, and her Bible-based comment to be inspired homily appropriate to the needs of the church today.¹⁷ Upon a number of occasions she refused to issue a supposedly authoritative statement concerning a moot passage of Scripture. In 1888, for example, she declined to exegete "the law" in Galatians 3:24 and directed delegates to the General Conference Session in Minneapolis to go to the Bible themselves for the information they sought. (Galatians 3:24 was the bone of contention on which the discussion of righteousness by faith foundered.¹⁸) Two years later she wrote "Never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible."¹⁹ Addressing delegates to the 1901 session of the General Conference, she said:

I do not ask you to take my words. Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible.... I exalt the precious Word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, "Sister White said this, " and "Sister White said that. "' Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands.²⁰

In 1910, when church leaders on both sides of a decade-long debate about "the daily" in Daniel 8:11,13 came to Ellen White for what they supposed would be an authoritative pronouncement that would settle the issue, she refused, saying:

I request that my writings shall not be used as the leading argument to settle questions over which there is now so much controversy... .

I now ask that my ministering brethren shall not make use of my writings in their arguments regarding this question.²¹

In summary, Ellen White's comments on biblical passages in their historical and literary context (as in the Conflict of the Ages series) are always in historical and literary context and in harmony with sound exegesis. Her applications of the principles inherent in biblical passages are homiletical and pastoral in nature. They are not exegesis of the Bible writer's intended meaning. Throughout her life, she encouraged people to go to the Bible themselves in order to learn what the writers intended. In fact, she even insisted that if people did so, they would not need her writings. In 1889 she wrote: "If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection you would not have needed the *Testimonies*."²²

Ways of Interpreting Scripture

The majority of Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars correctly follow the *historical method* of research-level Bible study. It

is called the historical method because it emphasizes the importance of discovering what the Bible writers intended their words to mean, within the historical context of those words. This method emphasizes the salvation history perspective of the Bible.

Most Seventh-day Adventists without theological training usually follow the *proof-text method*, which emphasizes the modern perspective of salvation history. Some who follow this method make use of some of the helps provided by Bible scholars, such as the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

Other Adventist scholars follow the *historical-grammatical* method, the Adventist version of the fundamentalist method generally followed by evangelical Protestant scholars. This method applies scholarly procedures within the framework of fundamentalist/proof-text presuppositions and principles, a process that sometimes invests proof texts with the aura of scholarly authority. For this reason, many persons without theological training find this method highly attractive.

Evangelical Protestant Bible scholars follow the *fundamentalist method* of interpretation, which applies scholarly procedures within a framework of verbal inspiration presuppositions about the process of revelation. It emphasizes inerrancy in the original writings and minimizes or eliminates the human aspect of the process.

Liberal Bible scholars follow the *historical-critical method*, which is based on the presupposition that the Bible is strictly a human product. Contrary to the allegations of some conservative Adventist scholars, *no* real Adventist scholar follows this method.

The historical-critical, fundamentalist, proof-text, and historical-grammatical methods of Bible study have in common the fact that they are based on *presuppositions about* the Bible rather than on *an objective evaluation of its internal evidence*. As a result, their conclusions automatically echo their presuppositions. The historical-critical method *a priori* eliminates the divine aspect of the revelatory process, while, for practical purposes, the other three eliminate the human aspect. These *a priori* presuppositions infect the process of exegesis with a hermeneutical virus that compromises its integrity and warps its conclusions to make them fit the presuppositions.

In contrast to these four flawed hermeneutics, the *historical method* submits any residual presuppositions to the weight of biblical evidence and thereby protects the integrity of the exegetical process. It recognizes the balance between the divine and human components of the revelatory process within the Bible itself, while demonstrating and remaining faithful to the *sola scriptura* principle in deed as well as in word. It accepts the divine message in its entirety and at the same time recognizes the historical circumstances of the people to whom the message was originally addressed.

Four Examples of Defective Biblical Hermeneutics

A brief statement regarding each of the four flawed hermeneutics follows.

The Historical-Critical Method

This method is sometimes referred to as "higher-criticism" in contrast to "lower criticism," which consists of a comparative study of ancient Bible manuscripts with their variant readings. It is "higher" and "historical" in the sense that a study of such things as authorship, historical setting, and literary analysis presumably requires a more sophisticated level of expertise. It is "critical," not in the sense of criticizing the Bible (which it does, however), but because of a presumably discriminating study of the Bible in contrast to a naive, simplistic reading of it.

Conservative Bible scholars also study such matters as authorship, literary form, historical setting, and transmission of the text, but are motivated by their presuppositions regarding the revelatory process. Historical-critical study of these matters includes such procedures as form criticism, source criticism, and editorial (redaction) criticism. The difference between the conclusions of conservative and liberal scholars depends more on their *a priori* presuppositions than on the procedures they follow. The Society of Biblical Literature unites Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish scholars who follow the historical-critical method.²³

The Fundamentalist Method

The fundamentalist method of Bible study originated during the late 1800s and early 1900s as a reaction to historical criticism. The term *fundamentalist* was derived from the title of 12 booklets, *The Fundamentals*, that appeared during the first two decades of the 20th century. It is based on the *a priori* presupposition that the revelatory process consisted of verbal inspiration and that, as a result, the original manuscripts were inerrant (perfect) in every respect, and the entire Bible in its present form is infallible.

This method of interpretation treats much of the Bible as if it were written especially with our time in view. The kingdom prophecies addressed to ancient Israel are seen as still awaiting fulfillment in modern Israel, and the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland is seen as preceding a literal Armageddon in the valley of Megiddo and a literal battle of Gog and Magog.²⁴ The secret rapture doctrine is also a concept based on the fundamentalist method. The interdenominational Evangelical Theological Society is the principal corporate advocate of the fundamentalist method of interpretation today.²⁵

The Proof-Text Method

The historical-critical and fundamentalist methods of Bible study require considerable professional training and expertise. Without such training, persons usually follow what is commonly referred to as the *proof-text method*. Their study is usually limited to a translation of the Bible, and they read the Bible primarily from the modern reader's perspective of salvation history, as if the writers had us primarily in mind. This method gives minor attention, if any, to the historical-cultural setting of Bible times, and assumes that the process of revelation excluded any significant cultural influence.

Those who make use of the proof-text method are usually not aware of the extent to which their presuppositions control both their evaluation of Bible data and their conclusions. They tend to see the Bible as an inspired code book consisting of propositional state-

ments ("proof texts") that stand on their own, apart from any literary or historical context. This method consists primarily of assembling "proof texts" on the basis of verbal similarity (in translation) irrespective of the context in which they occur. It interprets predictive prophecy from the modern perspective of salvation history, failing to take into consideration Bible principles that govern such prophecy.

The Historical-Grammatical Method

During the early 1970s, a variant of the fundamentalist hermeneutic entered mainstream Adventist biblical studies—the *historical-grammatical* method, as its proponents call it. The name is a bit puzzling because the historical and historical-critical methods, which they denounce, also examine the historical and grammatical data of the Bible. Puzzling also is their claim that the historical-grammatical method represents the historic Adventist method of Bible study. In fact, it was unknown among Adventists before 1970.²⁶

In essence, the historical-grammatical method does scholarly investigation of the Bible under the control of fundamentalist proof-text principles and presuppositions, and appears to confirm proof-text conclusions by scholarly procedures. During the past 25 years, it has won considerable acceptance among nonscholars, including church administrators. However, the historical-grammatical method has gained only limited acceptance among Adventist Bible scholars.

Subjective nonbiblical presuppositions about the nature of the revelatory process constitute the controlling principle of the historical-grammatical method. It rejects the dictation/verbal theory of inspiration, but relies on a revelatory process equivalent to that theory. This leads it to the related fundamentalist idea that the Bible has an artificial unity that upon occasion overrides explicit biblical evidence incompatible with the theory. It also disregards biblical data that do not support its conclusions (which sometimes are non sequiturs with respect to the weight of biblical evidence).²⁷

The Hermeneutical Dimension of Women's Ordination

It is appropriate that a chapter on biblical hermeneutics in a book about the ordination of women should focus on the hermeneutical aspect of the two principal biblical arguments usually presented against the ordination of women—the "order of creation" and male "headship."²⁸ These arguments are based on the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. In his 1994 book *the [sic] Tip of an Iceberg*, C. Raymond Holmes explores the hermeneutical basis for his understanding of relevant Bible passages.²⁹

Holmes's "iceberg" is the historical-critical method of Bible study, which he mistakenly attributes to Adventists who favor ordination for women, and which he believes could destroy the church. The "tip" of the iceberg is the present concerted quest for ordination, which he (again mistakenly) says is based on that method. No Adventist Bible scholar subscribes to that method, or to its presuppositions or conclusions. As a matter of fact, those who favor ordination do so on the basis of the *historical method* presented earlier in this chapter. Despite this mistaken identity, however, Holmes is to be commended for recognizing that differences of opinion about ordination are rooted in differing hermeneutics and for his excellent scholarly analysis from the historical-grammatical point of view.

The "Order of Creation"

According to the "order of creation" argument, Adam had priority over Eve because he was created first. But the inference that this argument forbids the ordination of women is a non sequitur. That is, the conclusion does not follow from the premise on which it is based. The Bible account of Creation is inspired; the assumed conclusion is an uninspired deduction. It is the *opinion* of those who advance the argument, not what the Bible itself teaches. This non sequitur is *read into* the Bible, and as such it compromises the *sola scriptura* principle.

The "Headship" Argument

The "headship" argument against ordaining women is based on the apostle Paul's directive about women being subject to men and not exercising authority over them or having a teaching role in the church (1 Cor. 11:7-10, 1 Tim. 2:11-14). The basic hermeneutical question here is: Were these directives intended to be applied universally, or were they an application of gospel principles to a particular situation? Paul's own practice and counsel under differing cultural circumstances leave no doubt that these directives applied exclusively to cultural circumstances. Take, for instance, his personal practice and his counsel to Roman and Corinthian Christians with respect to eating meat that had been offered to idols:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.... The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything that makes a brother or sister stumble (Rom. 14:14-21, NRSV).

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal... eat whatever is set before you without asking any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience-^ mean the other's conscience, not your own.... Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do (1 Cor. 10:27-29, 32, 33, NRSV).

The gospel principle involved here is. Do not do "anything that makes a brother or sister stumble." In Jewish circles this meant "Do not eat. ..." Paul's directive here was obviously culturally conditioned and applied only under certain circumstances. It was, in fact, contrary to his own practice under other circumstances.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem after eating with uncircumcised Gentiles at the home of Cornelius, "the brethren" challenged him: "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (Acts 11:3). To do so was a clear violation of Jewish cultural regulations. Peter defended himself by saying that the Holy Spirit had made clear to him that he should do so when with believing but uncircumcised Gentiles. Later, at the Gentile church in Antioch, when some Jews came from Jerusalem "he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction." In doing so, Peter acted hypocritically and Paul "opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned" (Gal. 2:11-14). The position Paul took on this occasion was culturally conditioned to circumstances that made Peter's conduct morally reprehensible, and Paul's censure appropriate.

When Paul associated with Gentile Christians, he ignored the cultural requirements of Judaism; when he was among Jewish Christians he voluntarily complied with them. Cultural circumstances conditioned his personal practice and *his inspired directives* in such matters. Thus, such counsel was obviously limited to the particular situation in which it was given. It did not have universal application for all time—or under different circumstances even in New Testament times. But the gospel *principle* involved does have universal application even today—we should respect the sincere but culturally conditioned practices of dedicated fellow Christians.

During Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, his fellow apostles asked him to participate in a ritual procedure at the Temple to prove to his Jewish brothers in Jerusalem that he observed Jewish ritual regulations (Acts 21:21-27). In complying with their request Paul, in principle, did just what he had severely reprimanded Peter for at Antioch. The difference was the cultural environments—Gentile in Antioch and Jewish in Jerusalem.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul directed women to "keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak" and if they wanted to "learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame³⁰ for women to speak in the church" (1 Cor. 14:34,35). But in this same letter he explained his own seemingly inconsistent conduct under varying cultural circumstances:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside of the law I became as one outside of the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside of the law. To the weak [that is, with an immature faith] I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I became all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessing (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Beyond any question, Paul's personal conduct and his counsel as a representative of Jesus Christ were both culturally conditioned to the circumstances in which he found himself and to which he addressed his teaching. The important thing—the *principle* involved—was an adaptation of his own lifestyle and his directives to the culture-conditioned beliefs, mores, and practices of the people he aspired to win to Christ.

The most important thing, in Paul's thinking, was the success of the gospel. So it should be with us as we consider the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. A clear application of this gospel principle is to practice ordination where it is culturally acceptable and will further the gospel, and to refrain from doing so where it is not, where it would be considered an offense.

If the great apostle were a delegate to an Annual Council or a General Conference Session of the church today, he would vote to ordain women where it is socially and culturally acceptable, and for not doing so where it is inappropriate. Enforcing culturally conditioned directives as if they were divine fiats violates sound gospel and hermeneutical principles. It also misrepresents the Bible and frustrates the ministry and mission of the Holy Spirit.

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and Encyclopedia as well as editing the Commentary. He also served as an associate editor of the Adventist Review, and for the last 10 years as senior book editor. Cottrell's book titles include Beyond Tomorrow, Faith and Reason, and Crisis and Victory. He's been in "active" retirement for 18 years, most recently as editor of Adventist Today.

1. The Old Testament respects the integrity before God of such non-Jews as Melchisedec of Jerusalem, Job of the Negeb, and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. But in principle it envisions salvation *exclusively* under God's covenant with Israel. It knows nothing of salvation outside of, or beyond, that covenant. Its perspective of salvation history is limited to Israel. See Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *SDA Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), vol. 4, pp. 25-38, and "The Old Testament Perspective of the Eschaton" (an unpublished paper). This, and other such papers cited below, are on file in the Heritage Rooms of the James White Library of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and the Del E. Webb Library of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.
2. See such passages as Matt. 24:34; Rom. 13:11, 12; 1 Cor. 1:7; 10:11, 12; 1 Thess. 4:7, 17; 5:6; Heb. 10:25, 37; James 5:3, 8, 9; 1 Peter 1:20; 4:7, 17; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20. Also, Raymond F. Cottrell, "The New Testament Perspective of the Eschaton" (unpublished paper). See Note 1.
3. Ibid.
4. Poetic parallelism: Ps. 119. Apocalyptic: Daniel and the Revelation. Wisdom literature: Ecclesiastes. Genealogies: 1 Chronicles 1 to 8; Matthew 1; Luke 3. Untranslatable plays on words: Jer. 1:12; 48:2; Eze. 7:6; 13:3; Micah 1:10-14 (see the *SDA Bible Commentary*). Figures of speech: Ps. 18:2; Isa. 1:8; Jer. 1:11, 13; Zech. 2 to 6. Soul: Ps. 16:10; 31:7; 49:18. Son: 1 Sam. 14:50; Ezra 7:1; Matt. 21:15; see *SDA Bible Commentary*. Ruach as "wind" and "Spirit": Gen. 1:2; 8:1.
5. Beard: Lev. 19:27. Paddle: Deut. 23:13. Polygamy: 2 Sam. 5:13. Concubines: Gen. 25:6; 2 Sam. 5:13. Divorce: Deut. 24:1-3. Slavery: Ex. 21:2-6. Covenant: Genesis 15. Shoe: Ruth 4:7. Eye for an eye: Ex. 21:24. Avenger: Deut. 19:6. Refuge: Num. 35:13, 15. Covering heads, silence: 1 Cor. 11:6; 1 Tim. 2:11-14.
6. God's anger: Isa. 12:1. Jealousy: Ex. 20:5; Nahum 1:2. Repentance: Gen. 6:6; Jer. 42:10. Laughing: Ps. 2:4; 37:13. Conquest: Ex. 20:12. Genocide: 1 Sam. 15:3. Tithing: Deut. 14:22-26.
7. Cottrell, "Historical Conditioning in the Bible and the Writings of Ellen G. White." See Note 1.

8. Preliminary reading: see introduction to each book of the Bible in the *SDA Bible Commentary*. Writer's opinion unclear: Ecclesiastes 3-19-22- 4-2 3 7-6:8; 7:3, 16, 17.
9. Assuming the inspiration of both Luke and Paul, by analogy Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:12-24 tips the scales in favor of placing the comma after, instead of before, "to day." See the paragraph following.
10. Cottrell, "Ellen G. White and the Bible," unpublished paper. See Note 1.
11. Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 126; cf. ____, *Early Writings*, p. 78; ____, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 416.
12. ____, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 663; ____, *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125.
13. ____. Letter 92, 1900; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 663.
14. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 31, 32.
15. An estimate of the number of entries in *Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 1, pp. 21-176.
16. See Note 7. See also Raymond F. Cottrell, "Ellen White's Use of the Bible," in Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 143-162. (The editor arbitrarily deleted several pages from my manuscript in which I considered problem areas in Ellen White's use of the Bible.)
17. Cottrell, "Ellen G. White and the Bible."
18. White, Manuscript 9, 1888.
19. ____, *Evangelism*, p. 256.
20. ____, *Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 33.
21. *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 164.
22. ____, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 665.
23. As a member of the Society of Biblical Literature for 25 years and a participant at its annual meetings, I am well informed on what is involved in the historical-critical method.
24. Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth* is the classic exposition of prophecy based on the fundamentalist hermeneutic.
25. Although not a member, I attended the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society for a number of years, and thus am well informed regarding their approach to the Bible. I have discussed and corresponded with the president of ETS and various ETS members for a number of years on the subject.
26. Cottrell, "Architects of Crisis: A Decade of Obscurantism" traces the theological climate of the church over the years 1969-1979; "The Adventist Theological Society and Its Biblical Hermeneutic." Both are unpublished papers. See Note 1.
27. Cottrell, "The Adventist Theological Society and Its Biblical Hermeneutic " See Note 1.

28. The biblical aspect of the issue has been developed at length by a number of writers, notably John C. Brunt, "The Ordination of Women: A Bible Perspective," *Ministry*, September 1988.

29. C Raymond Holmes, *the [sic] Tip of an Iceberg*, (Berrien Springs, MI: *Adventists Affirm* and POINTER Publications, 1994). (Copyright by the author- 611 Niemela Road, Wakefield, MI 49968.) For a synopsis of the book in the author's own words, see *Adventist Today*, vol. 2, No. 5, September-October 1994.

30. "Shame" is a socio-cultural reason for women not to speak in church, not a moral or biblical reason.