

Revelation, *and the God* Revealed *in It*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 1:19–21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; Heb. 11:6; Exod. 3:1–14.*

Memory Text: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV*).

Key Thought: However important it is to understand the way in which biblical inspiration works, it's more important to know the God who is revealed to us through that inspiration.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (*Ps. 19:1*). What they don't declare, however, is that our God loves us, died for us, and is actively working to save us from the consequences of our sinful choices.

The bottom line is this: whatever we can learn about God from other sources, the key source has to be the Bible. There are great truths, especially about the nature of God and His activity in this world, that we would know nothing about were they not revealed to us. As we have seen already, while people can sense something of a battle going on between good and evil, how else would they know of the great controversy were it not taught in the Scriptures?

This week we'll focus on two things: first, we'll look at what the Bible says about itself and how it was inspired. Next, we'll see what it teaches us about the God who inspired it.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 13.*

The Doctrine of Scripture

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. What do these verses tell us about how the New Testament authors regarded the Scriptures?

Peter affirms that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. His argument is that the prophets spoke because they were “moved by the Spirit of God.” The expression “moved by the Spirit of God” means that the impulse that led to the writing of the Scriptures came from the Holy Spirit. In short, the Bible writers were inspired by the Lord Himself.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. What do these verses tell us about the Bible and the ways in which it’s to be used?

It’s very clear that Paul wished Timothy to understand that because the Scriptures are divinely produced, they are dependable and valuable for the building up of the believer. Paul leaves no question as to Scripture’s truthfulness, authority, and origin. Notice, too, that he is talking about “all Scripture.” Paul doesn’t leave us the option to pick and choose which parts we think are inspired and which parts aren’t. Not everything (such as the ceremonial laws) is still binding on us, but that fact is radically different from the claim that some parts of the Bible are inspired and others aren’t, or that some parts aren’t as inspired as other parts (whatever that’s supposed to mean).

Read Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 22:41–46; John 10:34, 35. What crucial truth about Scripture and the authority of Scripture can we take from these texts?

No matter what we believe, we need a starting point, a foundation upon which to base that belief. For Seventh-day Adventist Christians, that foundation is the Bible—the ultimate standard and arbiter of truth.

How much time do you spend in the Word? How much of your life is patterned by what it teaches? Think back on the past 24 hours. What have you done, or not done, in that time frame that was based on the authority of Scripture?

The Nature of Inspiration

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. How do these words help us to understand how biblical inspiration works?

In the whole question regarding inspiration, people sometimes get obsessed with what are often deemed as problematic texts. Consider, for example, the wording of the inscription above Jesus’ cross as depicted in the Gospels. According to Matthew 27:37, it said, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Mark 15:26, “THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Luke 23:38, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” How are we to understand these differences?

As the Bible says, “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and is trustworthy; yet, we are given different accounts of the inscription on Jesus’ cross. These two points together can give us insight into the way in which inspiration works. This case shows that inspiration permits different expressions of an idea or event to the extent that the expressions adequately depict it. When a general approximation is an adequate expression, as in the inscriptions on the cross, inspiration accommodates it. On the other hand, where specificity is required, as in 1 Kings 6:1, inspiration provides it and should be accepted as such.

Compare Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5. In what ways do these accounts of Judas’ death seem to differ?

For a long time, critics of the Bible claimed that these verses gave conflicting accounts of Judas’ death. However, recent research has shown that the word translated as “falling headlong” in Acts 1:18 also means “swelling up.” Therefore, it’s likely that, after hanging himself, Judas was not discovered until his corpse had swelled up, causing his intestines to burst open. The point is, what at first seemed to be contradictory is now shown not to be. The vast majority of the Bible is not problematic. In the few places where some questions remain about apparent “errors” or “contradictions,” the prudent attitude would be humility. Who knows how many people have made a shipwreck of faith by focusing on “problem” texts. We have not been called to stand in judgment over the Word; we have been called, instead, to obey it.

The Mystery of the Triune God

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Gen. 1:26*).

Understanding how inspiration works, however important, is only a means to an end, and that end is to know God. A deep understanding of how the Bible was written, or even a deep understanding of the truths revealed in it, mean nothing if we don’t know the Lord for ourselves (*John 17:3*).

And one thing that the Bible explicitly affirms about the Lord is His oneness.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. What crucial truth is found in these texts?

The expression in the Bible about the oneness of God precludes any idea of many gods. There is only one God. However, the total picture we get from the Bible is that there is an inner “content” to Him, even in His oneness.

Read Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; John 1:1–3, 18; 20:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19. How do these texts begin to clarify the inner reality of God?

The Old Testament’s suggestion of plurality provides hints about the nature of the inner being of God. When we couple this with the New Testament’s statement about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we start to realize that there’s a lot about God’s nature that we don’t fully understand and probably never will. The triune aspect of God is one mystery, among many, with which we will have to learn to live.

The information that the Bible gives about God, including His three-part nature, is not provided in order for us to engage in speculative philosophizing but in order to further our understanding of His activities, especially His redemptive work on our behalf as the great controversy unfolds and is finally ended.

Who doesn’t have a lot of questions that only God can answer? How can we learn to trust Him until the time comes when He will give us answers?

The Attributes of Our Creator

The Bible reveals to us truths about God that we aren't going to find anywhere else. Among those truths is that He is the Creator. In fact, that's the first thing the Bible tells us about God, that He created "the heavens and the earth" (*Gen. 1:1*).

One of the many fascinating things about this text is that the Bible simply assumes the existence of God without trying to prove or show it. The Bible spends a great deal of time teaching us about what God is like, particularly as His character is revealed through His interaction with fallen humanity. But it spends no time trying to prove that He exists. It just assumes His existence.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 10:17. What do they say about God and the role that His Word plays in bringing us awareness of His existence?

Conviction about the existence of God cannot come from rational arguments alone. The Bible teaches that a person is convinced of God's existence through personal experience with Him as the Holy Spirit impresses one's heart and mind with the fact of His existence. In many cases, people may come to believe in God first; only afterward do they start to build a logical and intellectual foundation for faith in a God whom they cannot see.

Read Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; 1 John 4:8, 16; and 2 Chronicles 6:18. What do these texts tell us about the attributes of God? What other attributes of God are revealed in the Word?

Dwell on the attributes of God as expressed in the Scriptures. How many of them could you know from other sources, that is, from nature or from personal experience? What does your answer teach you about how crucial the Scriptures are to our understanding of what God is truly like?

The Activities of God

Even the most cursory reading of the Bible reveals that God is actively involved in humanity and in what happens here on earth. He is not distant, detached, or removed, as some ancient Greek concepts of God taught, or as even some Christian theologians try to depict Him. Though radically different from what He created, the Lord has intimately tied Himself to His creation.

As we saw yesterday, the Bible depicts the Lord as our Creator, an act that shows just how intricately tied to this world He really is. What do the following texts tell us about God’s other activities here on earth, especially in the context of the great controversy?

Gen. 11:9 _____

Gen. 19:24 _____

Exod. 3:1–14 _____

John 3:16 _____

1 Thess. 4:17 _____

Without a doubt, the Bible reveals a God who is greatly involved with humanity. The whole great-controversy scenario is, really, about how the Lord is working to save humanity from the clutches of sin and Satan. From the first act of the earth’s creation (*Gen. 1:1*) to the cross (*John 19:18*) to the re-creation of the earth (*2 Pet. 3:12, 13*), the Bible shows us unequivocally the Lord’s intimate activity with humanity.

In what ways have you, personally, experienced the activity of God? In what ways have you seen Him work in your life and in the lives of others? In what ways can you learn to draw comfort from knowing God’s closeness and intimacy with us?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Danger in Speculative Knowledge,” pp. 427–438, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Word Made Flesh,” pp. 746–749, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Preface” and “Introduction,” pp. 5–7, in *The Great Controversy*.

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

“In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. ‘Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.’ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 8, 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Apart from information we may obtain from the Bible, how confident can we be about our conclusions concerning God? Is there any room at all for an understanding of God from other sources? If so, what are those sources, and how can we be sure that the information they give us is correct?
- ❷ Why is any worldview that denies the supernatural in fatal contradiction to the Word of God?
- ❸ Science and technology have, in many ways, been a great blessing to humanity. In some ways, too, science has helped us to better understand the power of God (for instance, look at what it has shown us about the utter complexity of life!). What, though, are the obvious limits to what science can teach us about God? When, too, can science work against a true understanding of God?
- ❹ Why is the doctrine of a triune God (no matter how difficult to understand) so important to us as Seventh-day Adventists? Think what it would mean, for instance, if Christ were anything other than fully God?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 1:1, 2*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discuss the critical role of the divinely inspired Scriptures as a means of getting to know and understand God.

Feel: Respond on a personal and intimate level to the drawing power of the Holy Spirit.

Do: Actively pursue the study of God's revelation of Himself in Scripture and develop a personal relationship with Him.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God-Breathed Words of Life

A What role does the Holy Spirit take in inspiring human thoughts and words in order to illuminate God's nature and purpose?

B What role does Scripture have in helping followers of Christ to develop faith and a personal relationship with Him?

II. Feel: Intimacy With the Unseen God of the Universe

A How are Christ's disciples drawn into an intimate knowledge of, and relationship with, the unseen God of the universe?

B How does God's revelation of Himself through history and through the personal experiences of many biblical authors build faith and trust?

III. Do: In Pursuit of God

A How has God actively pursued His children, as revealed through Scripture?

B How, in return, do His children actively pursue a revelation of, and relationship with, Him? What does this pursuit look like on a day-to-day basis?

► **Summary:** The Scriptures, as breathed by the Holy Spirit through the thoughts and words of Bible writers, reveal the nature of God and His dealings with men and women, and draw His children into relationship with Him.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Accepting Scripture’s divine inspiration, we consequently strive to listen to our Creator God’s voice in its pages and live out our gratitude in response to the unfolding story of redemption.

Just for Teachers: This week’s study explores the statements that Scripture makes about its own inspiration and what it teaches about the God who inspired it. However, an intellectual belief that Scripture is inspired is not enough. The Word of God is also a Living Word to be personally experienced. Your goal in Step 1 is to encourage your class members to share their experiences with God’s inspired Word in response to the questions in the following activity: (Please note: You will want to allot no more than 5-6 minutes to this activity in order to ensure that you have at least 15 minutes to devote to Step 2, with 30 minutes for Step 3, ending with 5 minutes for Step 4.)

Opening Activity: Ask your class members the following questions:

- How old were you the first time you read the Bible, and what do you remember?
- Describe a time when you discovered a new story, principle, or truth from your reading of the Bible that changed an attitude or behavior in your life.
- In view of your sharing, what is your testimony about God’s inspired Word?

Discuss: Invite your class members to share their favorite method of personal Bible study and the ways in which this particular manner of learning has influenced their spiritual growth.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: In this section, we will explore the purpose and function of the inspired Word, as well as introduce a methodical approach to Bible study.

I. Why Study the Bible? (Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17 with your class.)

Regardless of age, profession, or background, most of us have a deep yearning to learn how to study the Bible in a manner that will draw us nearer to God and also equip us to share its truths with others.

In the passage that we just read, Paul encourages Timothy to remain inspired by, motivated by, and confident in the trustworthiness of the “holy scriptures.” Why? Paul explains that Scripture is able to “instruct” you; that is, give the believer the ability to grasp God’s saving purpose for his or her life when Jesus Christ is accepted by faith as Savior and Lord.

The beginning words of verse 16 tell us that the nature of Scripture is that it is “inspired by God.” While Paul is referring to the Old Testament in this verse (as the New Testament books had not yet formed part of what later would become the Holy Bible), today we accept the entire Old and New Testaments as inspired by God.

Understanding that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (*NASB*), one can then rely on its value and usefulness as a source for teaching and doctrine, as well as for the pointing out of error and as a way of setting one in the right direction. The phrase “for training in righteousness” (*NASB*) indicates Scripture’s profit and value in constructive education in how to live the Christian life.

Why study the Bible? Notice the ultimate function in the closing words of verse 17: “So that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (*NASB*). Paul indicates that with strong and solid scriptural training, the believer becomes skilled, able, and efficient to engage “in every good work,” that is, in all of the opportunities and responsibilities that may face the Christian believer in the process of participating in good works.

Consider This: How does the Bible serve as our “teacher”? What does its status as an inspired document mean for all aspects of our Christian walk?

II. How to Study the Bible (Read Hebrews 11:6 with your class.)

Many statistics indicate that a low percentage of church-attending members read their Bibles daily. While this may reflect the influence of a secular culture or the busyness of life, for many the case is that they lack a method of study and/or the skills that allow for discovery of deeper insights into biblical truths in a fashion that is relevant and connects these truths to their everyday lives.

How then might we study the Bible in a manner that will connect its study to our life experiences? A starting point is to develop a methodical approach to that study called inductive Bible study. The inductive Bible study method, by its

nature, develops and builds skills. Learning how to use the tools of inductive Bible study (referred to as observation, interpretation, personalization, and application) is a process that allows the reader to slow down when studying Scripture so as not to miss the deeper levels of meaning. It also facilitates listening to God’s Word, which, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, speaks to the soul and heart and allows the Word to transform lives.

Consider This: Why is the belief in the existence of God a requisite to drawing near to Him? How do we “listen” to God’s Word, and how does life transformation through a study of God’s Word take place?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Read Mark 5. Divide its passages into sections to be read by several class members, and then work through the chapter, utilizing the questions as a way in which to exercise each inductive Bible study skill.

Inductive Bible Study Skills:

1 Observation: This skill helps us to answer the question, “What does it say?” We become alert to the details of the text, finding key words, contrasts, comparisons, repetitions, and the use of questions. Let’s practice by answering the following questions in connection to Mark 5:

- What did the people in Decapolis of the Gadarenes know about “the demon man”?
- Now observe what Jesus wanted His “trophy of grace” to do in verses 18–20. Compare this with what the man wanted.

2 Interpretation: This tool answers the question, “What does it mean?” This step raises questions about the observations made of the text, such as “What does this word, phrase, or statement mean?” and “Why has the author used this particular word or phrase?” “What does this illustration imply?” These are called questions for understanding. This step is possible only after thorough time has been spent in observation.

- Read verses 18–20 again. What are the implications between the comparison of what the man wanted and what Jesus wanted him to do?
- What would such implications mean to the characters involved in these verses?

3 Personalization: This tool assists in answering the question, “What does this passage, insight, et cetera, mean for my life?” We look to identify with the characters, actions, or circumstances in the text.

- Review verses 21–25 while scanning to the end of the chapter. Identify with the father. What must this experience have been like for him?
- Observation: While urgently trying to get to the house, Jesus is interrupted by a sickly, nameless woman, and He takes vital time to hear her story.
- Question: As the father, what attitudes and feelings do you think you would have had?
- What would you have wanted to say?
- Identify with the woman and answer the same questions.
- Try to identify with the disciples.
- Questions for personalization: In relationship to Mark 5, which of these statements would Jesus say to you, and where do you need to go in order to find healing?
- “ ‘Go in peace, and be healed’ ” (*vs. 34, NKJV*).
- “ ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe’ ” (*vs. 36, NIV*).
- “ ‘I say to you, arise’ ” (*vs. 41, NKJV*).

4 Application: This last step in the inductive Bible study method is the most important. You must ask yourself: what is one thing I can do today or this week that will help me to begin living according to the biblical principle(s) that I have discovered? What will I specifically do, keep, or obey?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following activity with your class. Begin by distributing 3 x 5 cards (or small pieces of paper) and writing utensils, if supplies are available. Alternately, this exercise can be conducted without the use of cards or writing utensils by substituting discussion in the place of the supplies.

Activity: Ask the class members to write down one thing for which they are grateful and a specific action they will carry out as a result of today’s Scripture study. Please be sure to emphasize that it must be specific. For example, this Thursday at 6:00 P.M. I will share dinner and one Bible highlight with my new neighbor.

In closing, encourage your class members to try the skills of inductive Bible study, and tell them to plan on sharing next week how God’s inspired Word is coming alive in their Bible study.