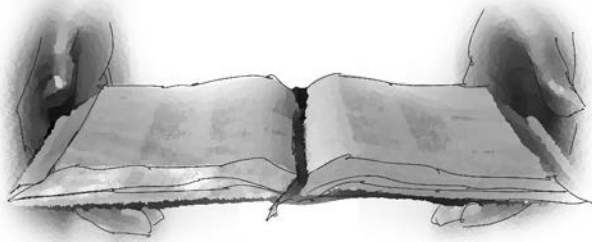


Disciples *and* Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:1–12, Matt. 12:3–8, Matt. 5:17–39, Luke 24:13–32, Acts 1:16–20.*

Memory Text: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (*John 5:39*).

Using a metal detector purchased from a rummage sale, Englishman Terry Herbert discovered gold-plated Anglo-Saxon weaponry and silver artifacts buried beneath a farmer's field. The estimated monetary value of the find exceeded \$5 million in U.S. dollars.

Like someone seeking treasure in a field of dirt, rocks, and rubbish, we must be careful not to let things get in our way and make us miss the real treasure above: Jesus Christ. Searching for eternal riches, Pharisees and Sadducees alike “excavated” the ancient sacred writings. Ironically, their treasure map, Scripture, had been so radically misread that they missed the point—Jesus—completely.

Explicitly and implicitly Jesus incorporated Scripture into His disciple-making methodology. The ultimate “treasure quest” was rooted in the prophetic writings, which pointed to Him. Thus, to miss Jesus is to miss the mark. All this means, then, is that all our disciple-making endeavors must, ultimately, be about Jesus and that which He has done for us.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 4.

Jesus and the Bible

Because Jesus is the example for all believers, His level of commitment to Scripture becomes more than a matter of passing interest.

Read Luke 4:1–12 and 16–21. What do these passages suggest about Christ’s attitude toward the Bible?

The narrative of Christ’s wilderness temptations shows that, by quoting Scripture, Jesus rebuffed every satanic challenge and invitation. The Scripture scrolls were not likely available to Christ during this 40-day desert sojourn. This clearly indicates that Christ had committed substantial portions of Scripture to memory. While the Scriptures quoted in the wilderness were taken from the writings of Moses, Jesus quotes elsewhere from the other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (*Matt. 21:42, 22:44*). Clearly, Christ had a widespread knowledge of Scripture.

Notice, however, that Christ understands that the Scriptures are more than just a tool for overcoming temptation and achieving personal holiness. Jesus recognizes that Scripture points to Him. During the synagogue visit recorded in Luke 4:16–30, Jesus quotes Isaiah and then declares that this text points to Himself as the One anointed to release the oppressed and proclaim freedom. Jesus understood that He fulfilled Messianic prophecy. Thus, Jesus not only understood that the Bible pointed to Him, but early on in His ministry He used the Bible to point others to Him, as well.

Though it’s important to know the Bible, that alone isn’t enough. Some of the biggest-name Bible scholars have not even been believing Christians. Thus, we need to ask ourselves, How can we make sure that our study and reading of the Bible help us to come to a better knowledge of Jesus and what He has done for us? That is, how can we make Bible study something that transforms our lives?

The Authority of Scripture

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the way in which Jesus viewed the Bible? *Matt. 5:17–20, 12:3–8, 15:3–11, John 10:34–37, 17:14–19, Luke 24:44.*

Whenever Christ debated with the religious authorities, He relied not on abstract philosophy, not even on personal authority, but on the teachings of Scripture. When determining right from wrong, Jesus based His argument on a scriptural bedrock. When opponents challenged Christ's doctrinal purity, He directed them to specific passages within Scripture. When considering practical matters, Jesus referred listeners to divine revelation. Christ understood that His divinely ordained mission was to accomplish that which the ancient prophets had predicted.

Contrast Christ's exalted understanding of Scripture with the prevailing attitude often exhibited among even professed Christians today. Entire denominations have come to deem the Bible as interesting but, basically, unreliable historical manuscripts. Everything—the six-day Creation, the Exodus, even the bodily resurrection of Jesus (much less a literal Second Coming)—has been called into question, or even relegated to the status of myth.

The implications for discipleship are clear. Why would anyone want to give his or her life to a cause based on nothing but myths? Instead, people burdened with real problems need a real Savior. Otherwise, the gospel becomes a tarnished treasure or, metaphorically, plastic coinage covered with simulated gold. From a distance, some might be fooled, but, upon closer examination, the plastic will suffer rejection. The only safe course is to follow Christ's example of exalting, honoring, and obeying the Bible.

Death is no myth, is it? Nor is it just a symbol. It is one of the harshest realities that we all face. Think through the implications, then, of any view of the Bible that treats biblical teachings, such as the resurrection of Jesus or His second coming, as mere symbols or myths. Why must we, individually and as a church, never allow ourselves to get caught up in this satanic trap?

Public Proclamation

Jesus attracted people to Himself in various settings, including public ones. Scripture assumed a prominent role in Christ's public proclamations. Direct quotations and scriptural allusions filled His sermons and public discourse.

Read Matthew 5:17–39. In what ways do these verses show how Christ utilized Scripture for public ministry?

During Christ's earthly sojourn, the ordinary Israelites' relationship with Scripture was apparently highly legalistic. They looked to Scripture for regulations and ethical guidance. Upright behavior was considered the payment for eternal bliss. Jesus, however, overturned their legalistic notions and substituted a heart-based religion for a system of external controls.

Christ-centered religion is rooted in a heart transformation that leads to ethical behavior. Ironically, some of the Pharisees had bypassed having a living relationship with God in their haste to achieve moral perfection. Jesus identified these shortcomings, and as a cure He beckoned listeners to accept Him as Savior and Master. With Jesus as the internally controlling force, behavioral standards were not lowered but elevated. All one has to do is read the Sermon on the Mount to see just how elevated His moral standards were.

“As something strange and new, these words fall upon the ears of the wondering multitude. Such teaching is contrary to all they have ever heard from priest or rabbi. They see in it nothing to flatter their pride or to feed their ambitious hopes. But there is about this new Teacher a power that holds them spellbound. The sweetness of divine love flows from His very presence as the fragrance from a flower. . . . All feel instinctively that here is One who reads the secrets of the soul, yet who comes near to them with tender compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 6.

It's easier than we think to be legalistic, judgmental, and condemnatory, isn't it? How can we protect ourselves from falling into these common practices?

Personal Ministry

Examples of Christ's public ministry abound. Equally fascinating are Christ's personal encounters, both with ordinary and elite members of society. These stories offer unique insights into the centrality of Scripture in Christ's ministry.

Read John 13:18–20 and Luke 10:25–28, 24:13–32. What role did Scripture play in these passages? What purpose did Jesus have for quoting these particular verses? What resulted from these small group encounters with Scripture?

Repeatedly, Christ quotes Scripture in conjunction with His calls to discipleship. This clearly implies that Jesus' authority and credibility rested on Scripture, not merely on personal charisma. This is seen especially in the ways in which Jesus used the Scriptures as He worked with the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus.

“Beginning at Moses, the very Alpha of Bible history, Christ expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied. In the fullness of their joy they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand the witness borne to Him by the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. Upon these their faith must be established. Christ performed no miracle to convince them, but it was His first work to explain the Scriptures. They had looked upon His death as the destruction of all their hopes. Now He showed from the prophets that this was the very strongest evidence for their faith.

“In teaching these disciples, Jesus showed the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to His mission.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796–799.

Dwell on Luke 24:32, especially the phrase that their “heart[s] burn[ed] within.” What does that mean? When was the last time your heart burned within you over the truths that we have been given? If it hasn't in a long time, might it be because your heart has grown cold? If so, how can you change?

The Next Generation

Without a doubt, as we have seen, Jesus places a heavy emphasis on the Bible. Never did He question the authority, veracity, or authenticity of a single Bible text. And yet, through the centuries and even today, many people do just that.

Read Matthew 12:15–21, Mark 1:1–3, Acts 1:16–20, 3:22–24, and Romans 10:10, 11. What do these texts tell us about the ways in which the earliest Christians viewed Scripture? What lessons can we take from them for ourselves and how we relate to the Bible?

The earliest Christian writers continued the practice of using Scripture to authenticate the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. In effect, they were saying that Christianity was inextricably connected to God's self-revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus Himself had appealed to these sacred writings. Now Christ's disciples were doing the same. Appeals to personal experience, miracles, and other witnesses for Christ were important and had their place; obviously, however, nothing supplanted Scripture as the primary witness for Jesus.

Christ's earliest followers sought guidance from Scripture concerning the church's mission, its everyday practices, and its spiritual discipline. Human speculation and guesswork were minimized; Scripture became preeminent. Prayerful consideration of God's revelation was evident in church councils (*see Acts 15*). Scripture touched every facet of the life of the early church.

How foolish would it be then for us, especially at the end of time, to have any other attitude toward the Bible?

How can we all learn to make the Bible central to our faith and use it to point us to Jesus? What are practical ways in which we can allow the teaching of the Bible to truly impact how we live and how we relate to others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Bible Teaching and Study,” pp. 190–192, in *Education*; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Thessalonica,” pp. 221–230, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies. . . . Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 221, 222.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some practical ways in which you can incorporate Scripture into your daily routine? How can you use the Bible in your personal witnessing?
- 2 Why did Jesus emphasize scriptural interpretation rather than miracles and personal charisma? What happens if music, the health message, social functions, or anything else, replaces the Bible as being central to our faith?
- 3 How dependent on Scripture must today’s Christians become? Evaluate the importance of Scripture in your church’s life regarding the establishment of priorities, the channeling of resources, and faithfulness to mission.
- 4 Dwell on the fact that we have no indication in the Bible of any Bible writers ever calling into question the veracity or authenticity of any other texts. Why should that be so important to us, today, at a time when so many people, including many Bible scholars, seem to have made it their first priority to challenge the truth of the Bible at every level?

Farmer Hildo's Dream

Farmer Hildo arrived in a sleepy town in central Brazil and thanked the man who had given him a ride. He lifted his small bag of clothes and box of herbal medicines from the cargo area of the truck and stepped to the side of the dirt road. Hildo lived far from town and came a few times a year to sell his herbal medicines door-to-door and to share his faith with those who would listen.

Farmer Hildo had become a Seventh-day Adventist several years earlier; although there was no church nearby, he faithfully kept the Sabbath and saved his tithe and offerings until he could attend a church.

During his visits to town, Hildo had met 10 people who either were Adventists or knew something about Adventists. He invited them to meet with him whenever he was in town. One couple owned a cybercafé and offered to meet there to watch Sabbath School and church programs on the Internet. Hildo urged everyone he knew to come.

The small group asked the mission office for a pastor to help them organize and grow into a congregation. The closest pastor already had one church and 13 companies, but he met with the believers. He helped them organize evangelistic meetings and taught them how to visit people and share God's Word with them. The little congregation spent two weeks visiting homes and inviting people to attend the meetings.

Farmer Hildo was thrilled when 150 people attended the evangelistic series and 33 were baptized. The pastor trained the members to follow up on interests, and soon the group of believers could no longer fit in a home. With the help of the mission, they rented a hall in which to meet.

The new family of believers was a dream come true for Farmer Hildo, who had worked and prayed and longed for a church for so long. When the church became a reality, he said, "I've been praying for the church for 16 years."

Farmer Hildo didn't live to see the little congregation worship in its own church, but the believers are working hard to make his dream—and theirs—a reality. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping

this congregation purchase or build their own simple worship center so they won't have to move whenever the rent goes up. Thank you for helping Farmer Hildo's dream of a church in this once-dark area to become a reality.



Some members of the company Farmer Hildo helped establish in Ruberval, Brazil.