

Why Are Bible Explanations Needed?



SABBATH—MAY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 24:36–45; John 1:41; Acts 17:16–32; John 9:39–41; Nehemiah 8:1–3, 8.

MEMORY VERSE: “Without faith no one can please God. Whoever comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who sincerely [with all their heart] try to find him” (Hebrews 11:6, ERV).

READING THE BIBLE includes explaining the Bible. How do we do that? What rules do we use? How do we explain the different styles of writing in the Bible? Are we reading a picture story? Are we reading a dream filled with word pictures that show us the future? Or are we reading a story that tells us about history? The answers to these questions also are part of explaining what the Bible says.

At times, some people use the Bible to tell them what to do. They simply open the Bible anywhere and pick a verse on the page that they hope will give them good advice. But this plan can lead people to very strange and wrong ideas. Here is an example: a husband leaves his wife for another woman. The wife opens the Bible to Genesis and reads: “I will make you and the woman hate each other” (Genesis 3:15, NIV). After the wife reads this verse, she feels happy. She believes the Bible is telling her that her husband's feelings for this other woman will not last!

For sure, we need to understand what a verse says and means. If we do not, then the verse can become an excuse for us to do whatever we want. So, it is very important for us to read the Bible carefully. We must be careful to explain the Bible correctly too.



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THE WAY WE READ THE BIBLE (Luke 24:36)



Jesus' followers had ideas about the Savior that made them blind to truth. That is why Jesus' followers so often did not understand Jesus.

Read about the experience that Jesus' followers had in Luke 24:36–45. Jesus' followers knew the Bible well. What kept them from seeing its true meaning even after the things happened that Jesus told them about?

No one comes to the Bible with an empty mind. Every Bible reader and student comes to the Bible with personal experience and history. These things will cause us to think a certain way about the Bible. Jesus' followers also had their own ideas about who the Savior was and what He was meant to do. Their ideas came from the hopes about the Savior that people had at that time. So, the ideas that Jesus' followers had about the Savior made them blind to truth. These ideas kept them from understanding what the Bible says about the Savior. That is why Jesus' followers so often did not understand Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection or His waking up from the dead.

We all have beliefs about this life and God. Sometimes our beliefs can cause us to understand the Bible in the wrong way. Here is an example. Let us say that someone does not believe that miracles are possible. He or she does not believe that God works in any special way to save His people. So, this person will not believe in the Bible's miracles. He or she will not read and understand the Bible as a true report of God's acts in history. This person will explain the Bible in a very different way from someone who accepts that miracles are real.

No one who explains the Bible can separate fully from his or her past, experience, ideas, and thoughts. So, when we study the Bible, we must be aware that we come to God's Word with our own thoughts about life and God. Sometimes, our own thoughts, ideas, and experience can get in the way of our understanding the Bible. But there is good news for us. The Holy Spirit can correct our limited views and thoughts. He can help us to read the Bible with an open mind and an honest heart. Again and again, the Bible shows us that people with very different pasts can understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit makes this possible. God's Spirit leads us "into all truth" (John 16:13, KJV).

What are some of your thoughts and ideas about life? How can you surrender all these things to God and let the Holy Spirit give you ideas that agree with Bible teachings?

THE BIBLE AND ITS LANGUAGES (John 1:41)

The Bible writers wrote in very old languages. They wrote the Old Testament mostly in Hebrew, with a few parts in the Aramaic language. The New Testament writers wrote in a language named Koine Greek. Most people alive today do not speak and read these old languages. So, that is why the Bible is written for us in different modern languages.

Every Bible version includes the work of explanation. Some words in one language do not have an exact match in another language. So, it takes a lot of skill to carefully write a Bible version. The work of writing the Bible in a new language and making it clear is named “hermeneutics.”

Read 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:26; John 1:41; John 9:7; Acts 9:36; and Luke 24:27. All these verses show us examples of writing the Bible in a new language and then making its meaning clear. In Luke 24:27, even Jesus must explain the Bible’s meaning to His followers. What does this work tell us about why explanation is an important part of our reading and understanding the Bible?

The word “hermeneutics,” as we saw, means to write the Bible in a new language and to explain it clearly. The word “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word “hermeneuo.” “Hermeneuo” comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes. Hermes was the messenger of the Greek gods. So, Hermes’s job was to explain the gods’ messages to the people.

There are many good versions of the Bible for us to read. The people who made these versions did a good job of showing us the Bible’s meaning. So, we do not need to know Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic to be able to understand the most important truths shown in the Bible. But with any good Bible version, we must have clear explanations of the verses too. That is the whole reason for hermeneutics, which includes making a good version and clear explanations of the Bible. Hermeneutics help to show us the correct meaning of the Bible. Hermeneutics also help us to know how to live Bible truth now. As Luke 24:27 shows us, Jesus made Bible truth clear for His followers. Make a picture in your mind of having Jesus as your own Teacher! Today, He gives us His Holy Spirit to help us to understand the Bible.

Why is it important to study the Bible with prayer? Why is it also important to obey its teachings?



Make a picture in your mind of having Jesus as your own Teacher!

THE BIBLE AND THE WAY OF LIFE AROUND US (Acts 17:16–32)

Read Acts 17:16–32. In Acts 17, Paul shares the Good News with people from a different culture or way of life: the Greeks. How do the different ways of life around us help us to decide what is important?



“God allows Pharaoh’s heart to grow stubborn.”

It can be helpful to know about Near Eastern culture or ways of life. This information can help us to understand the Bible better. Here is one way: “In Hebrew culture, a person was responsible for the evil that he did not do but that he let happen. So, that is why Bible writers often say that God is responsible for things that He did not do but that He let happen. One example is Pharaoh’s heart. God allows Pharaoh’s heart to grow stubborn.”—“Methods of Bible Study,” section 4.P. at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study, adapted.

Culture also causes us to ask some important questions about how we read and explain the Bible. Does the Bible only have meaning for the people living in the culture when it was written? Or does God’s message have meaning for all humans? What happens if someone’s experience of culture becomes the test or rule for how we decide what the Bible says?

In Acts 17:26, Paul gives an interesting view about life that people often miss when they read this verse. Paul says that God made all the people on the earth from one man. Yes, we all come from different cultures. We follow different ways of life. But we all come from the same person, Adam. Adam is the father of us all. So, that makes us all one, even if we are different from each other in many ways. God is the One who made all humans. Sin is not limited to one culture. All humans need to be saved too. We all need God’s gift of everlasting life. This gift comes to us from Jesus, who died for us.

Yes, God speaks to different people living at different times in the Bible. At the same time, His messages are for people of all different times in history. Bible truth is not limited only to the people who were alive when the Bible was written. Think about algebra. Algebra is a special form of math. Someone invented algebra around A.D. 800 in Baghdad. Does this mean that algebra’s rules and its truths are limited only to that time and place? Of course not. The same is true for God’s Word, the Bible. Yes, the Bible was written long ago in cultures very different from ours today. But Bible truth is as important today as it was when it was first written.

WHAT SIN HAS DONE TO OUR HEARTS (John 9:39–41)

Read John 9:39–41 and John 12:42, 43. What stopped the people in these verses from accepting Bible truth? What warning is there for us in their stories?

It is easy for us to not like the religious leaders who did not accept Jesus. Yes, the leaders had powerful proof that Jesus was the Son of God. But the leaders rejected Jesus anyway. We need to be careful that we do not behave the same way about the Bible.

Yes, sin changed our hearts. It pulls us away from God. Sin changes every part of our lives. Sin also changes the way we understand the Bible and explain it. That is because sin has hurt our minds and thoughts. So, our minds and thoughts become closed to God's truth. Sin makes our thoughts evil. Sin fills our hearts and minds with pride and doubt. Then we lie. We are not close to God and each other. We disobey God's law. So, we must not be filled with pride.

Pride causes people to put human thinking above Bible truth. That is because they let human thinking decide all truth, including Bible truth. When we think this way, we take away the power of God's Word, the Bible.

Some people listen only to ideas that they like, even if these ideas go against God's truth in the Bible. This is the same as lying to ourselves. God warns us about the dangers of lying to ourselves (Revelation 3:17). Sin and lying to ourselves also cause doubt to grow in our hearts. Then we will not believe God's Word. When we start to doubt God's Word, we never will be sure about truth. That is because the person who doubts makes himself or herself a judge. Then he or she decides which parts of the Bible are true. When that happens, we are in a lot of danger.

So, how should we read and explain the Bible? We should come to the Bible with hearts that are not filled with pride. We should surrender our minds to God. We should not look for things in the Bible to doubt or complain about. Pride, lying to ourselves, and doubt turn our hearts away from God. Then we will not want to obey Him.

Have you ever fought against Bible truth? That is, has the Bible shown you to do something, but you wanted to do something else? What happened? What did you learn from this experience?



When we start to doubt God's Word, we never will be sure about the truth.

WHY WE NEED A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLE TRUTH (Nehemiah 8:1–3, 8)

Read Nehemiah 8:1–3, 8. Why do each of us need a clear understanding of the Bible? Why is that so important for us as a church too?

What is the most important question in the Bible? How are we saved? If we do not know how we are saved, how can we have any hope? As Jesus Himself said, what good is it if we get everything this life has to offer but we lose our everlasting life (Matthew 16:26)?

So, we must have a clear understanding about God's plan to save us. If we explain the Bible in the wrong way, then, for sure, we will believe false ideas. And not just about God's saving plan. We will believe false ideas about everything else the Bible teaches. Even Jesus' followers were not safe from this problem. In their day, many false teachings came into the church. Teachers built these false teachings on false explanations about the Bible.



We have a message to give to everyone on earth. So, we must not be confused about what this message means.

Read 2 Peter 3:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about why a correct understanding of the Bible is important?

We want to live by the Bible and only the Bible. So, it is very important how we choose to explain the Bible. We do not allow other people or things to explain the Bible for us. We do not depend on tradition, or the way things have been done in the past. We do not depend on church leaders. We have only the Bible to tell us what we believe and how we live. So, that is why it is so important for us to have a correct understanding of the Bible.

Without a correct understanding of the Bible, we cannot have agreement in our teachings or a healthy church. Our hearts and our work for God will not be joined together as one in Jesus. We have a message to give to everyone on earth. So, we must not be confused about what this message means. If we are confused, how can we expect to share that message with the people who need to hear it?

Read the Three Angels' Messages in Revelation 14:6–12. Why is a correct understanding of these messages so important to the work that God gave our church to do?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “What to Do With Doubt,” pages 105–113, in *Steps to Christ*, and from the document “Methods of Bible Study,” section 1: “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods,” section 2: “Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture,” and section 3: “Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture.” (Methods of Bible Study can be found at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.)

“When you study the Bible, let go of your personal ideas and beliefs about what the Bible should say. You will not discover the truth if you study the Bible only to prove your own ideas right. Lay your own ideas aside. With no pride in your heart, sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from Him. Then you can study the Bible to see what God wants to say to you. You will grow in understanding too. Some people think they are too wise to study the Bible. Jesus says to them, You must have a heart with no pride if you want to learn how to be saved.

“Do not let old beliefs and ideas decide what you believe about the Bible. Let your mind be free from these thoughts. Read the Bible with prayer. Study it carefully. If the Holy Spirit shows you that your old ideas are wrong, then do not try to make the Bible agree with your ideas. Make your ideas agree with the Bible. Do not let your old beliefs or practices from the past control your understanding. Open your mind to see wonderful things in God’s law. Find out what is written there. Then stand firm on the everlasting Rock, who is Jesus.” —Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, page 260, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How do our views about life, our education, and our culture, or the way we live, control what we think about the Bible? Why must we be aware of how these things control what we believe about the Bible?
- ② What does sin do to us that causes us to not understand the Bible? Let us say that we want to do something that the Bible says is wrong. How will that sin cause us to read and understand the Bible in the wrong way?
- ③ How can an understanding of Bible times help us better understand the Bible? Give some examples.



“With no pride in your heart, sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from Him.”