

The Final Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Gal. 1:11, 12; James 2; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:16.*

Memory Text: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV).

Key Thought: From where does the Bible derive its authority?

We all live under one final authority or another, whatever it happens to be. As Christians, we believe that the final authority is God, whose will is expressed in the Bible. Hence, the Bible is the final Word.

But why should any one of us put ourselves under the authority of a book? The answer is that the Bible isn't just a book; it is, instead, the Word of God.

Thus, by virtue of who its Author is, the Lord God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Book comes with its divine authority built in. After all, who has authority over God? No one. That's why the Bible has to be the foundational and final Word.

This week we'll take a look at the authority of the Scripture. What does the Scripture say about itself? What claims does it make about itself and its origins? How did the Bible writers view other books of the Bible? And, most important, what does Jesus Himself have to say about the Scriptures? After all, He—the Lord Himself—would have, no doubt, the final word on the final Word.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.*

The Word of the Lord

The Bible writers made incredible claims about the books they were writing. Phrases used to describe the original sources of their messages were expressed as “the Lord has spoken” (*Isa. 1:2, NIV*), “this is what the Lord says” (*Amos 1:3, NIV*), “the word of the Lord that came . . .” (*Mic. 1:1*), or “this is what the Lord has revealed to me” (*Jer. 38:21, NIV*).

The Old Testament writers testify that their messages came directly from God. It is “the word of the Lord” that came to such Old Testament writers as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and others (*Jer. 1:1, 2, 9; Ezek. 1:3*).

Read 2 Samuel 23:2; Ezekiel 2:2; 11:5, 24; Micah 3:8. What common thread runs through these texts?

Read Luke 1:70 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. What does the New Testament say concerning the inspiration of the Old Testament?

Read Romans 4:3 and Galatians 1:11, 12. What was Paul’s conviction concerning the Scriptures? What authority does Paul say lies behind the gospel he preached?

Scattered over the long centuries, all these men, regardless of the vast differences in their circumstances and background, testified to the same thing: that the messages they were writing weren’t their own but that they were moved by the power of God, who commanded them to write what He was telling them.

If we believe the prophets, that they were inspired by God, what practical implications does that belief have for our daily lives? That is, how well does your life reflect your belief in the authority of Scripture? What things, if any, have you done in the past 24 hours that violated the clear teaching of the Bible?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

▶ **Key Text:** *2 Timothy 3:16*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

Know: That the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

Feel: Assured that the Holy Spirit inspired each Bible writer.

Do: Choose to live our lives in accordance with God's Word.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. The Inspired Word of God (*1 Pet. 1:10*)

A The Spirit of God inspired the messages given in the Scriptures. How can we be sure of this?

B Bible writers themselves attribute their messages to the Lord. Give some examples.

II. Jesus and the Scriptures (*Matt. 4:4*)

A Jesus often made references to what was written in the Scriptures. Give some examples.

B Describe how Jesus verified His own mission by using the Scriptures.

III. The Unity of the Scriptures (*1 Thess. 2:13*)

A How did New Testament writers show confidence in Old Testament Scriptures?

B New Testament writers believed themselves to be inspired of God. Did the Lord communicate with them in the same way He spoke to the prophets of old?

▶ **Summary:** God speaks to us through His Word. We can be sure of its divine authority.

Learning Cycle

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

C O N T I N U E D 

God-breathed

Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Where does Paul place the origin and authority of Scripture?

The Greek word for “inspiration” in 2 Timothy 3:16 means literally “God-breathed.” It clearly indicates that the Scriptures originated from God. God enabled His messengers, prophets, and apostles to grasp and then communicate that which He revealed to them in a trustworthy and authoritative fashion.

Keeping in mind the above text, especially the definition of “inspiration,” read Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 33:6. What commonality do you find between these texts? What message should this give to us about the authority of the Bible?

The same creative power that brought the world into existence was also behind the origins of Scripture! Dwell on the implications of this amazing truth.

The Lord communicated His Word through various means. Besides revealing Himself in visions and dreams, He sent messages in the form of direct appearance (*Exod. 3:2-7*), through an angel (*Dan. 8:15, 16*), or through eyewitnesses (*1 John 1:1-3*).

Regardless of how God communicated to them, the writers of the Bible were not acting merely as writing machines. God did not push them as He would keys on a typewriter to produce His message. Each writer had his own writing style; these differences are seen all through the Bible. The crucial point is that these messages were not their own; they were writing down what was delivered to them by God. They were His messages, not their messages (*2 Sam. 23:2, Amos 3:8*).

As a result of this divine revelation, the Bible also is called “the book of the Lord” (*Isa. 34:16*), “the gospel of God” (*Rom. 1:1*), “the oracles of God” (*Rom. 3:2*), “the word of Christ” (*Col. 3:16*), and “the good word of God” (*Heb. 6:5*).

Compare the various writing styles found in Scripture. For example, compare Paul to John, Isaiah to Moses, or Isaiah to John. Does one speak more clearly to you than others? If so, why? Also, what might be God’s reason for allowing the author’s own writing style to come through in what is His Word?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Consider These Situations:**

1. You purchase a household item that requires assembly. Unfortunately, the instruction sheet is missing. You try to put it together anyway. The finished result is a misassembled mess that does not work as intended.
2. You are driving to an unfamiliar destination. Perhaps you have vague verbal directions but no map; perhaps you have a map, but do not use it; and you refuse to ask anyone for directions. You get lost and miss your appointment.
3. You are taking a test. Because you do not read the directions at the top of the page, you do not realize you need to answer only one of the three essay questions, and instead try to answer all of them—and do it poorly.

Ask class members to share examples of their own failure to follow directions.

►STEP 2—Explore!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, **What do I need to know from God’s Word?**

Bible Commentary**I. The Word of the Lord** (*Gal. 1:11, 12*)

There are good reasons Paul felt compelled to detail the direct source of his messages. It would have been easy for someone to say, “Paul is just parroting ideas he heard from Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem.”

In addition, Jewish theologians believed in a long chain in the transmission of divine messages. A text in the Mishnah, a Jewish Bible commentary, says “Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue” (*Abot 1:1*). Paul knew, however, that the longer the chain of transmission, the less

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Christ's View of the Scriptures

Today there are all sorts of views about Scripture, about its authority, validity, role, and so forth. Unfortunately, many within Christianity don't view the Bible as the kind of authority it ought to be.

What authority is that? Well, let's go to the ultimate Authority Himself, Jesus. How did He view Scripture?

What do the following texts tell us about how Christ viewed the authority of Scripture? *Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Mark 2:25; 12:36; Luke 4:21.*

Those texts are but a few that reveal how truthful and authoritative Jesus' view of Scripture was. Jesus believed in the story of Creation (*Mark 10:6*), of Noah and the Flood (*Matt. 24:37-39*), and of Jonah and the large fish (*Matt. 12:39-41*). He also referred to the creation of the first couple (*Matt. 19:4*), and He quoted Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5, which speaks about the original purpose of marriage.

Read Luke 24:25-27 and John 10:35. What did He say about His endorsement and acceptance of the Old Testament as a whole?

Jesus Himself verified His own mission by using scriptures. “ ‘For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?’ ” (*John 5:46, 47, NKJV*). After His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus quoted Scripture to clarify the importance of His ministry. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (*Luke 24:27, NKJV*). Throughout His life on earth, Jesus used Scripture, spoke from Scripture, promoted Scripture, uplifted Scripture, and interpreted Scripture. “Jesus is the true Interpreter of Holy Scripture. His message is our key to unlock the correct meaning of the Old Testament. . . . Christ's use of Israel's Scriptures is our model of biblical interpretation. Our guiding principle is based on the conviction that the redemptive activity of God in the history of Israel reached its fulfillment in Christ.”—Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, Fla.: First Impressions, 1997), p. 13.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

likely people are to believe its accuracy.

So Paul makes it clear that there is no intermediate source of his gospel. In Galatians 1:11 he calls his message, literally (in Greek), “the gospel that was gospeled to me.” This excessive phrase is meant to show that the story of Jesus is not just a message he is passing on, like an office memo. Rather, it is something that came in and transformed him, allowing him to speak with godly power.

Consider This: You have heard the gospel; but have you been “gospeled” by the gospel, as Paul was?

II. God Breathed (*Gen. 2:7, Ps. 33:6, 2 Tim. 3:16*)

Because breathing is both necessary and detectable, yet breath is invisible to the eye, the Greek word for breath became the root of some important spiritual words. *Spiros* is the root for the word *spirit* (an invisible force) as well as *inspire* (to fill with spirit or enthusiasm) and *expire* (to die).

Consider This: Have the class identify the three separate uses of God’s breath (transmission of truth, creation of biological life, and creation of the physical universe). Does God literally blow, or breathe, to do these creative acts, or is this a metaphor? What does John 4:24 mean by its description of God as Spirit?

III. Christ’s View of the Scriptures

Bible students must remember that when Jesus quoted Scripture, He did not have our modern Bible, but was quoting from the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. While this gives credence to the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative, Christ’s use of it does not alone remove the need for us to understand the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Much of what the Old Testament addressed was, in fact, brought to completion in Jesus. For example, we need not sacrifice animals any longer, because Christ is our sacrifice. Perhaps the most significant text in this regard is Matthew 5:17 (*NIV*): “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Consider This: What is the proper use of the Old Testament for

Apostles and the Scriptures

The New Testament writers also showed full confidence in the Scriptures.

Read James 2. In what ways does he show his belief in the authority of the Old Testament?

In the book of Romans alone, Paul quotes more than forty times directly from the Old Testament, and chapters are essentially built upon quotations or allusions from the Old Testament scriptures. He quotes from Isaiah at least twenty-five times. Peter did the same thing in his books. All the epistles have a strong foundation in the Old Testament scriptures (*see also Matt. 1:23, 3:3, Heb. 10:7, 1 John 3:12*).

The New Testament authors have confidently assured us of their conviction regarding the authority of Scripture (*2 Tim. 3:16*). In his admonition to the rich, as stated in James 1:11, James used Isaiah 40:6, 7 and Psalm 103:15. The apostle Peter expressed his confidence in the Old Testament prophecies with emphatic words in 2 Peter 1:21. He was alluding to the Old Testament (*Exod. 12:5*) when he said in 1 Peter 1:19 that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

When Paul spoke about the gospel in Romans 1:17, he used the underlying principle of the gospel as found in Habakkuk 2:4. In describing humanity's sinful nature (*Rom. 3:10-12*), the apostle makes reference to Psalm 14:1-3. When Paul spoke to the Jews in Rome, he said, "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet . . ." (*Acts 28:25, RSV*).

The apostles were solidly convicted that the Scriptures were the Word of God. At Pentecost Peter said, "This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David" (*Acts 1:16, NKJV*). Paul also said, "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (*1 Thess. 2:13, NKJV*).

What forces exist in your culture that work against having the kind of trust in the Scriptures as depicted in today's and yesterday's lessons? How can you recognize those forces? Even more important, what can you do to help protect yourself, and others, against them?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Christians today? How do you sort out those things that have present authority from those fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question, **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Exercise:

You can use this exercise to begin your class. You will need to copy the following for each class member. They also will need a blank sheet of paper. Give these verbal instructions: "We're going to do an exercise today. Please read and follow the instructions I'm handing you. Some of these things may seem silly, but remember: It is intended to test your ability to follow directions."

Directions:

1. Read all directions before beginning.
2. On the sheet of paper you've been handed, number your paper 1-7.
3. On the first line, write your name.
4. On the second line, write the name of the person sitting next to you.
5. On the sixth line, draw three stars.
6. In the center of the paper, below number seven, draw a box.
7. Write the number of siblings you have to the right of the box.
8. Divide the box into four equal parts.
9. Draw a flower in the bottom left-hand corner of the box.
10. Turn your paper upside down.
11. Write out today's date using all capital letters.
12. Turn your paper right side up again.
13. On line three, draw a small picture of your favorite food.
14. Draw a circle around it.
15. Write the name of your first pet on line four.
16. Draw a star in each corner of your paper.
17. Underline two of the stars.
18. Turn your paper over.
19. Fold it in half lengthwise.
20. Fold it in half the other way.
21. Write your middle name on the outside.
22. Ignore directions two through twenty-one and enjoy watching every-

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Unity Amid Diversity

Read 2 Peter 3:16. What is Peter referring to as Scripture?

With Peter's reference to Paul's writings as Scripture, we see internal evidence for the validity of both Testaments; both were considered the Word of God (*see also 1 Thess. 2:13*). And despite some vast differences in the backgrounds and authors of the Bible, there's also an incredible unity found within both.

A span of a thousand years covers the writings of the Old Testament. There was, then, a gap of about five hundred years when no Bible books were written, at least not until the birth of the New Testament church. The books of the New Testament were started and completed in the last half of the first century A.D. Thus, the Bible took more than a millennium and a half to be completed.

Read the following texts: Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:36-40, John 13:35, 1 Corinthians 13. What great unifying theme appears here?

One of the strongest evidences that the Bible was prepared under divine direction is its unity. Although the writers came from diversified backgrounds, its content has one predominant purpose. The Bible was written by kings, a prime minister, shepherds, fishermen, prophets, priests, a publican, a physician, and many other people with different occupations—but all of them wrote about the same God. Some books are historical; some are prophetic. Some writers wrote in poetry; others in prose. Some books are missionary reports; others are church letters or personal correspondence. However, each speaks about the same loving and caring God; each one informs us about the same plan of salvation; and each one uplifts the same standard of righteousness. All look forward to the same eternal reward. This is not coincidence. It all shows that the Bible writers have one Source of inspiration.

What common theme in Scripture is your favorite? Which speaks to your heart the best? Go through a few books in both Testaments and pull out texts that share this common theme. Bring them to class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

one else do this activity wrong—because they didn’t follow instruction !!

Had you read all the directions at the beginning, as told to, you would have saved yourself a lot of time!

Witnessing

Discuss when following God’s directions can be an effective witness. Is there ever a time when following His directions can be a bad witness (for example, when following His instructions become legalistic)? Explain your answer.

► STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

“No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the Long Parliament. England became a people of the book, and that book was the Bible. It was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom has not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm. As a mere literary monument, the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue. But far greater was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people. Elizabeth might silence or tune the pulpits, but it was impossible for her to silence or tune the great preachers of justice and mercy and truth who spoke from the Book. The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new conception of life and of man superseded the old. A new moral and religious impulse spread through every class.”—John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (1874), ch. VIII, sect. 1.

Consider This:

- 1** Green speaks of the powerful effect that reading the Bible had on the English people in the Elizabethan age. Is the Bible continuing to change your life?
- 2** More important, are you giving the Bible a chance to change your life? Many people have lovely, leather-bound Bibles that are worthless to them, because they do not read them!
- 3** With all the talk about biblical Christianity that goes on in some nations today, why do so many of the arguments in the public forum seem petty?

Further Study: “The Word of God,” pp. 11–21, in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2005 ed.); Ellen G. White, “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers,” pp. 15–23, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “The Primacy of the Word,” pp. 29–33, in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. . . . The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers. 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.

“The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. v.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, share your responses to Thursday’s question.
- 2 What other sources of authority can be in competition with the Bible? Identify these sources (government, media, science, culture, etc.), and then as a class talk about what you can do to help balance these sources with the Bible while, at the same time, accepting the Bible as the final authority in your life.
- 3 No doubt there are some things in Scripture that are difficult to understand. Why should that not be surprising when one considers what this book is about and the themes it deals with? What can you do to help one another maintain faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God, despite some things in it that can be hard to grasp?