

Query #26 March 2017  
Understanding the Bible

Query:

How do we recognise when the Bible is to be read literally and when is it to be seen as a spiritual message? How can we know when “water” means the liquid substance, and when “water” should be read like this? “And he says to me, The waters which you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues [languages]”. Revelation 17:15. How do we know if “earthquake” means the ground shaking, or the overthrow of a government? Revelation 6:12; 11:13.

Is there only one truth, and if so who decides what is right?  
How can we interpret the Bible correctly?

Response:

That’s quite a few questions all in one! Many Bible students have a real problem with interpretation of the Bible because they do not understand the cardinal rules regarding it. There are just three of them.

1. There can be no PRIVATE interpretation of the Bible.

2 Peter 1:20-21.

Knowing this FIRST, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

This simply means that we cannot safely decide for ourselves what any word or verse means. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to tell us what He means by it today, and for us as individuals. The Spirit is the Guide of the Scriptures therefore these are not to be twisted and turned to mean what any man or woman may want them to mean, or to put forward their ideas, sentiments and human schemes.

Neither is the Spirit given - nor can it ever be bestowed - to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

Isaiah 8:20.

To the law and to the testimony: if they [including what *We* think is the real Spirit as well as the counterfeit] speak not according to this word, it is because there is NO light in them [for us]. [NOT, maybe a little which I can pick out for myself, but NONE AT ALL, for we cannot trust our own minds, let alone someone else’s!]

Why?

Before the Bible came into being as a Holy Book, God communicated with humanity through visions and dreams. “And God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob’. And he said, ‘Here am I’.” etc. Genesis 46:2. And that will happen again when we no longer have access to the written word. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit”. Joel 2:28-29.

But in the meantime, because of Satan’s misrepresentation of God and His word, we need the written version so that we can read and reread to make sure that we have heard Him correctly. If, after having read and understood, we should receive visions and dreams then we can check them against the writings.

We must also allow the Bible to tell us what its prophetic symbols mean; e.g. the ram = Medo/Persia in Daniel 8:20. If we do not know where to find the explanation then the Spirit will guide us to it.

In the same way some words must be put to the test of God’s explanation. For example, the word “blood” is used in the first of the plagues which fell on Egypt in Moses’ time. Exodus 7:19. Was that the same literal fluid that flows through human veins, or was it a liquid which resembled blood?

To find the answer we must enquire as to who could turn river water into real blood? And not just in the river, but in the jugs and storage facilities in the houses too. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, Say to Aaron, Take your rod [it was now Aaron’s, as well as Moses’ – see note 1], and stretch out your hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone”. Exodus 7:19.

Only a Creator could do that,  
for it requires a change in molecular structure.

Satan’s counterfeit would not, could not, be real blood. And yet is written; “And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, neither did he hearken to them; as the LORD had said”. Exodus 7:22. Both results looked the same. However, Satan’s “blood” was not real, but only something which warranted the use of the adjective (for that was what it looked and felt like).

In like manner humans sometimes speak of “golden” apples and “golden” sunsets. We all know that word then to be “gold-like” and we would not be silly enough to assume that they were really made of the precious metal if someone mentioned them to us. Let us allow the Spirit to interpret for us where this kind of language is used and we will have less problems with interpretation.

Consider when God told Aaron to throw down his rod and it became a snake - He showed that His was real by its eating of the magicians’ counterfeits.

Exodus 7:8-12:

And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, “When Pharaoh shall speak to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for you’: then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent’.”

And Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

The same word is used of both, but some only looked like serpents, while one was really a living snake.

Satan cannot create blood, so if it was real blood in the river in the first plague then God would have had to make the change. But does He punish through plagues? Or does He have to allow us to retreat from His protection and take the consequences of our actions?

This is the big question.

The plagues were the RESULT of refusal/rebellion and not a punishment for them, although there was a warning implied in the results (John 5:14 etc.), for that advice came in God’s word to them. They were NOT primarily a sign or a wonder from God at all, but *the result* of sin when God’s protection was no longer there.

Have you read the message in Isaiah?

Isaiah 1:18.

“Come now, and let us reason together”, says the LORD: “though your sins be as scarlet [cloth], they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as [white as] wool.”

Would you take those words literally? Or these?

God declares,

Isaiah 44:3:

“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.”

This is explained by;

Psalm 112:4:

“To the upright there arises light in the darkness.”

Surely both of these mean that to those who are seeking for knowledge, and who accept it with gladness, bright rays (!) will shine from the throne of God. But only the Spirit can tell us that.

And how can we tell the difference every time, especially if we don't have the knowledge of an explaining verse right away? One method is to apply the test of God's character as a Saviour to the verses which cause us the problem. In the snake incident God was showing to Pharaoh through a sign or wonder His power to save [i.e. protect].

So the plague was used (not caused) by God as a warning and a plea.

Why the emphasis on the rod?

Exodus 4:1-5:

And Moses answered [the Son of God] and said, “But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken to my voice: for they will say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you’.”

And the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he said, “A rod.” And He said, “Cast it on the ground.” And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it [he instinctively jerked back].

And the LORD said to Moses, “Put forth your hand, and take it by the tail” (and he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand [again]:) “that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

Thus, in picture form, we are shown that God's power, in His (or His agent's) hand, is useful, but out of His control it can be dangerous! Thus we can learn to read His word in pictures too!

The plagues, on the other hand, were the results of NOT LISTENING to God. They came without the direct intervention of a loving Father, for they came from Satan. In fact, they came despite God's attempts to stop their disastrous effects by getting the Egyptians to follow His counsel. Later, when the Israelites listened, they were protected completely from the fourth and subsequent plagues. (Exodus 8:22-23.) And when some Egyptians did likewise they did not suffer the effects of disobedience of the seventh, as we are told.

Exodus 9:19-27:

[Moses told them] "Send therefore now, and gather your cattle, and all that you have in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail [an unheard of event in Egypt] shall come down upon them, and they shall die."

He that feared [believed] the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: and he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field [in defiance].

And the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt."

And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and *the fire ran along upon the ground*; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt [this was most unnatural weather in Egypt]. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field. [All this was the work of the destroyer.]

Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail [for there was the protection of God].

And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked [disobedient]."

The raising of Moses' hand and rod did not create the plague, it merely signified God's permission for Satan to take over. "Permission" here equals God's acceptance of the rebel's choice to withdraw from Him. Again, God did not actively do this, but it does show that Satan's abilities are very great.

He can actually control the weather when God is not present to protect. See Mark 4:35-41. Why did Satan carry on with his plagues? For the exact reason that we are reading about them – to confuse us as to character of God. To persuade us that God is a destroyer and a punisher.

To really understand we must read ALL the verses dealing with our desired subject and allow the Spirit to harmonize them. There is a story told of four blind men being led to inspect an elephant. One held it by the trunk and said, “An elephant is like a large snake”; another grasped a leg and said, “An elephant is like a tree”; the third took the elephant’s tail and said, “No, it’s like a small wiry snake”; the fourth and last said, “It’s like a sail which is constantly moving!” for he had hold of an ear. Who was right? They all were, *in their areas*, but only a sighted person could see the whole and realise that they were only experiencing a portion of it. To put it another way, we often cannot see the forest for the trees!

We must give up our dictionaries and ideas as to what the words mean and listen instead. We should be like the apostles who were with the Son of man on the Mount of Transfiguration and listen. God said, “This is My beloved Son, *hear Him*”. Mark 9:7. The only tool we should use outside of the Bible is a concordance because that can show us where the same thought or word is used again so that we may compare their usage. There are also references in the margin of some Bibles which do the same.

It should go without saying that we should not *trust* the interpretations of the Adventist elders and treat them as infallible, for if we do so then we have simply placed ourselves among those who follow *tradition*! It is good to know what they taught, but a simple look at any of them will show us that many of their original ideas have since been proved wrong! (I can think of one major one right now which is endemic in the church, accepted both by clergy and laity without one single verse in the Bible to prove it, which would lay open an enormous can of worms, but I won’t bring it up here. If you want to know about it then email me.)

On the other hand, the pioneers have given us many that like solid rock!

We are advised to lay a line of “bricks of truth” one on top of another to be able to see the complete truth.

Isaiah 28:10:

For precept [a saying or thought] must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

## 2. **That said, the next point is:**

Ephesians 4:29-30.

“Let no corrupt [false] communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying [teaching], that it may minister grace to the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption”.

Ephesians 4:29-30 Amplified Bible (AMP)

<sup>29</sup> Do not let unwholesome foul, profane, worthless, vulgar words ever come out of your mouth, but only such *speech* as is good for building up others, according to the need *and* the occasion, so that it will be a blessing to those who hear you speak. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve [make sad] the Holy Spirit of God but seek to please Him, by whom you were sealed *and* marked branded as God’s own for the day of redemption the final deliverance from the consequences of sin.

[Amplified Bible \(AMP\)](#)

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This has most often been taken to mean not to swear etc. when speaking, but if we apply it to doctrine then we can see that to teach something of our own devising will not only fail to help another in their Christian journey, but will also upset the Spirit who of course, knows the truth and wants to show it to us.

So query the Holy Spirit and don’t give up easily.

We should take the literal meaning of the words first before we apply a spiritual meaning to them unless they are part of a vision. BUT, be careful. All that appears to be plain English is not necessarily so. The Bible is a collection of books written by many authors over a period of 1,300 years. Nationality, customs and culture are shown in their original writings, and we are using a translation of all of them.

And we should keep in mind that they were not scribes taking dictation.

What the Spirit did was *show* the holy men of old the truth in a vision so that they could speak or write it in their own way. Just as the Word of God (the Son) is both God and man, divine and human in one body, so the word of God (the Bible) is both human and divine in one book. There are no mistakes or contradictions, only problems in our understanding, which the Spirit can sort out if we allow Him.

Sadly, the truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have often been involved in doubt and darkness by many apparently learned men and women, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, have taught that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These folk are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared, "You know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God". Mark 12:24.

Therefore the language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning under the Spirit's direction, unless a symbol or figure is employed, with the character of God as a Saviour always shining from the background. Christ has given the promise, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine", and we should believe Him. John 7:17.

If we would but take the Bible and read it (whether by subject or chapter is not important); if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse our minds; a work would soon be accomplished that would make angels glad, and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error. So it is best that we read for ourselves.

We can share what we learn with others *if they want to know*, but we should never condemn their understanding as a life or death error. That is always the work of a destroyer!

### 3. **The third cardinal rule:**

It is ***THE PRINCIPLES*** of righteousness in the Bible that we should look for, not just *the illustrations* of them. The stories of the Book were collected and put together to suit all nationalities, all ages, all cultures, in all the centuries since the time of Moses (about 1200BC).

And in them God says:

Isaiah 28:

9 Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts [people who can think].

And at the same time:

1 Peter 2:

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2 as [spiritual] newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby: 3 if so be you have tasted that the LORD is gracious [a free Giver].

Its principles are simple enough for baby (i.e. new) Christians to grasp as well as deep enough for philosophers and mature Christians to think about for decades.

Here is one of them.

Isaiah 28:

<sup>14</sup> Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men [and women], that rule this people which is in Jerusalem [this is also addressed to all the apostate leaders in all the religions].

<sup>15</sup> Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death [we have come to terms with it], and with hell [the grave] are we at agreement [we think it’s a stepping stone to a greater existence]; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come to us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves”. [The subject of death is a foundation stone for many false religions.]

<sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD GOD, “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious corner Stone, a sure Foundation: he that believes [has understanding] shall not make haste [or panic].” [Jesus the Foundation Stone did not want to die. Hebrews 5:7. He was terrified at the thought, for it means separation from God even if only for a time. Luke 22:41-44.]

[Using building terms, He says] <sup>17</sup> “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet [the plumb bob, the straight edge of strict justice]: and [then He changes to the weather;] the hail [the truth] shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters [the Spirit] shall overflow the hiding place.

<sup>18</sup> And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell [the grave] shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge [plague] shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it”.

<sup>19</sup> “From the time that it [death] goes forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report [just to hear about it]. <sup>20</sup> For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it”. [A nice picture of the discomfort caused by lies!]

<sup>21</sup> For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim [where He protected king David through his obedience, 2 Samuel 5:19-21]: He shall be wroth [see Note 2] as in the valley of Gibeon [where He saved the liars of Gibeon through His people, Joshua 10:8-10]: that He may do His work, His strange [for Him]

work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act [of allowing total withdrawal from His protective cover of grace].

<sup>22</sup> Now therefore be you not mockers, lest your bands [chains] be made strong [stronger]: for I have heard from the LORD GOD of hosts [of] a consumption [there is to be a using up, a closing of probation/opportunity], even determined upon the whole earth. <sup>23</sup> Give you ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech [listen carefully].

What is the principle here?

No matter how hard God tries there are always many who would rather “do their own thing”, that is, “think their own thoughts” than believe His word. Even to the point of saying that death is a good thing, a way of passing over into a new world, when God says that it is His enemy and a separation from Him, the Giver of Life. It is NATURAL that men and women would rather listen to a lie than search out the truth, but that phase will come to an end one day. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.)

Disregard all those tales of leaving the body and progressing into a tunnel of bright light, hearing a pleasant voice, etc. See them for what they are, lies and visions from the rebellious one.

For God says:

“The last *enemy* that shall be destroyed is death.” 1 Corinthians 15:26:

Think on these things.

### Conclusion:

To understand the Bible we must “hunger and thirst” after righteousness. Matthew 5:6. We must not be content with a superficial explanation, or one which appears to contradict (in any way) some truth *we have accepted* from the Spirit in the past. Don’t misunderstand me here; we will not reject any new idea because it seems to be different, until we have laid both of them (the old and the new) side by side in our minds and pleaded with the Spirit to either show which is the truth or to harmonise them. And this means that we will not accept or reject unless we are sure that He has given us the answer.

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Note 1:

Exodus 4:

<sup>10</sup> And Moses said to the LORD, “O my LORD, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since You have spoken to Your servant: but I am slow of [Egyptian] speech, and of a slow tongue [it’s been 40 years]”.

11 And the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say”.

13 And he [exercised his freewill] said, “O my LORD, send, I pray You, by the hand of him whom You will send [please send someone else]”.

14 And the anger [disappointment] of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said, “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he comes forth to meet you [right now, for he is obedient to Me]: and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

15 “And you shall speak to him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with your mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach [both of] you what you shall do. 16 And he shall be your spokesman to the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to you instead of a mouth, and you shall be to him instead of God.

17 “And you shall take this rod in your hand, wherewith [both of] you shall do signs”.

Note 2:

God’s “anger” is not like ours. It is the Bible word used to describe the emotion He is feeling when He is interfering in human affairs – a thing He does not do lightly.

{RH, April 29, 1875 par. 10}

Abraham was appointed of God to preserve the truth amid the prevailing sins and corruptions which were increasing. But the descendants of Abraham departed from the worship of the true God, and transgressed his law. They mingled with the nations who had no knowledge or fear of God, and gradually imitated their customs and manners, *until God's anger was kindled against them, and he permitted them to have their own way* and follow the devices of their own corrupt hearts. He had conferred special blessings upon Abraham because he was faithful in keeping his commandments, and had chosen his family as his peculiar treasure.

{ST, October 16, 1879 par. 3}

It was the custom of the Pharisees to hold themselves aloof from the sick and needy. They held that sickness and distress were always an evidence of God's anger toward the transgressor. Yet frequently these very men, who exalted themselves as holy and enjoying the peculiar favor of God,

were more corrupt in heart and life than the poor sufferers whom they condemned.

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Who wants to add (or subtract!) from these thoughts? I won't argue as I have stated, but I will publish your Scriptures so that we may review all the words of God on the subject.

Next query. To be discussed from April 1st 2017.

1 Corinthians 9:

<sup>24</sup> Know you not that they which run in a race run all, but [only] one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain.

When Paul refers to the Christian “race” what does he mean? And who is going to be the winner?

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To see the list of some my past queries and work them out for yourself with God, [click here](#).

To see queries and my responses, [click here](#).

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