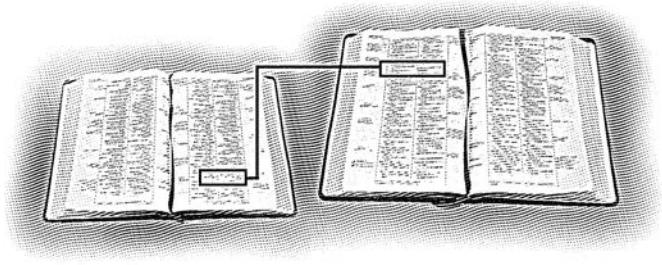


Language, Text, *and* Context



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 32:46, 47; 1 Kings 3:6; Num. 6:24–26; Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 2:15–23; Gen. 15:1–5.*

Memory Text: “Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you” (*Deuteronomy 31:26, NKJV*).

More than 6,000 languages are spoken among the world's billions. The complete Bible has been translated into more than 600 languages, with the New Testament or some portions translated into more than 2,500 other languages, as well. That's a lot of languages, for sure. But at the same time, it is still less than half of the known languages of the world.

An estimated 1.5 billion people do not have any part of Scripture translated into their first language. While there is still much work to be done, the efforts of Bible societies have ensured that six billion people can read Scripture.

And what a blessing to be among those who do have the Bible in their own language! We often take it for granted, forgetting that not only do many not have the Bible but also that for centuries in Europe, the Bible was purposely kept away from the masses. Thanks to the printing press and the Reformation, that is no longer the case. Those of us who do indeed have the Bible continue to look at how we can, filled with the Spirit, learn to study the Word and come to know the Lord revealed in its pages.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 16.

Understanding the Scriptures

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. For what purpose was the Bible given to us?

The Bible was written as a witness to God's work in history, His plan for redeeming the fallen race of humanity, and to instruct us in all ways of righteousness. The Lord chose to do this in human language, making His thoughts and ideas visible through human words. In redeeming Israel from Egypt, God chose a specific nation to convey His message to all peoples. He allowed that nation to communicate His Word through their language, Hebrew (and a few portions in Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew).

The rise of Greek culture brought a new opportunity, allowing the New Testament to be communicated through the universal language of Greek, which was widely spoken in that part of the world at that time. (In fact, there was even a Greek translation of the Old Testament, as well.) This "universal" language enabled the apostles and early church to spread the message far and wide with new missionary zeal after the death of Christ. Later, the apostle John "bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw" (*Rev. 1:2, NKJV*). In this way, the Bible indicates the continuity of this inspired "witness" and "testimony" from the first writer of Scripture to the last.

Read Deuteronomy 32:46, 47. Why was it so important for the children of Israel to obey "all the words of this law" (*Deut. 32:46*), the Torah, or "instruction"? How does God's Word "prolong" our days? What might that mean in our context today?

Some people not only have the Bible translated into their native language but even have various versions of it in their own language. Others might have only one version, if even that. But regardless of what you have, the key point is to cherish it as the Word of God and, most important, to obey what it teaches.

Why is it never "a futile thing" (*Deut. 32:47, NKJV*) to obey the Word of God and to teach it to your children, as well?

Words and Their Meanings

In every language there are words that are so rich and deep in meaning that they are difficult to translate adequately with a single word into another language. Such words require a wide study of their usage in the Bible to understand the breadth of meaning.

Read 1 Kings 3:6, Psalm 57:3, Psalm 66:20, Psalm 143:8, and Micah 7:20. How do God’s mercy and kindness extend toward His created beings?

The Hebrew word *chesed* (mercy) is one of the richest and most profound words in the Old Testament. It describes God’s love, loving-kindness, mercy, and covenant attitude toward His people. In these few passages, we have seen Him show “ ‘great mercy [*chesed*] to Your servant David . . . ; You have continued this great kindness [*chesed*] for him’ ” (1 Kings 3:6, NKJV). He “shall send forth His mercy [*chesed*] and His truth” (Ps. 57:3, NKJV). Concerning Israel, He will “give truth to Jacob and mercy [*chesed*] to Abraham” (Mic. 7:20, NKJV). Entire books have been written on the word *chesed*, trying to capture the depth of God’s mercy and love toward us.

Read Numbers 6:24–26, Job 3:26, Psalm 29:11, Isaiah 9:6, and Isaiah 32:17. In these passages, what is the “peace” or shalom talked about in them?

The Hebrew word *shalom* is often translated as “peace.” But the meaning of the word is much deeper and broader than this. It can be translated as “wholeness, completeness, and well-being.” God’s blessing and graciousness keep us in a state of shalom, which is a gift from God (Num. 6:24–26). By contrast, Job’s experience of trouble produces a situation where he is “ ‘not at ease’ ” (NKJV) nor is he “ ‘quiet,’ ” for he lacks shalom. In this hectic world, it is a profound blessing to welcome the Sabbath day with the words *Shabbat shalom*, for our communion with God provides the ultimate peace and wholeness that our lives desire.

In whatever language we speak and read—even without knowing the original meaning of these words—how can we experience the reality of what these words mean to the best of our understanding?

Repetition, Word Patterns, and Meaning

In Hebrew thought, there are a number of ways to express ideas that reinforce meaning and emphasize the importance of concepts. Unlike European languages, Hebrew contains no punctuation marks in the original language, so the language structure developed other ways to communicate such ideas.

Read Genesis 1:26, 27 and Isaiah 6:1–3. What words are repeated in these passages? How are these repeated words enhanced by different concepts that are introduced through repetition?

One of the ways that the Hebrew writer could emphasize a certain attribute of God was by repeating it three times. As the Creation account comes to the apex of God’s creative work, the text emphasized the unique importance of created humanity. The term *bara’*, “to create,” always has only God as its subject. That is, it is only God that has the power to create without being dependent on preexisting matter. Here the text describes the creation of man: “So God *created* man in His own image; in the image of God He *created* him; male and female He *created* them” (*Gen. 1:27, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). Notice the threefold repetition of the word “create.” Moses, thus, emphasized that human beings are created by God and that they are created in *His* image, as well. These truths were his emphasis.

In Isaiah’s vision and call, the seraphim repeat the words “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (*Isa. 6:3*). The emphasis is on the holiness of an awesome God whose presence fills the temple. We also see this holiness through the words of Isaiah, as he stands in the presence of the Almighty: “Woe is me, for I am undone!” (*Isa. 6:5, NKJV*). Even a prophet like Isaiah, confronted with the holiness and character of God, cringed at his own unworthiness. Thus, even here, long before we have Paul’s exposition on human sinfulness and the need of a Savior (*Romans 1–3*), we can see the Bible giving expression to the fallen nature of humanity, even in a “good” person such as Isaiah.

In Daniel 3, we have a repetition (with variations) of the phrase “the image which Nebuchadnezzar set up” (*Dan. 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18, NKJV*). This phrase, or variations of it, is repeated 10 times in the chapter to contrast Nebuchadnezzar’s action in defiance of the image God revealed to him through Daniel (*Dan. 2:31–45*). The emphasis here is on humanity’s seeking to make itself into a god to be worshiped, in contrast to the only true God, the only One worthy of worship.

Texts and Contexts

Words in Scripture always occur in a context. They do not stand by themselves. A word has its immediate context within a sentence, and it is this unit that needs to be understood first. Then there is the wider context of the overall unit in which the sentence occurs. This may be a section of writing, a chapter, or a series of chapters. It is essential to understand as well as possible the context of words and sentences in order not to arrive at erroneous conclusions.

Compare Genesis 1:27 with Genesis 2:7. Then read Genesis 2:15–23. How can we understand from these different passages and contexts the definition of *adam*, the Hebrew word for “man”?

We have already seen that the repetition of the term *bara'* in Genesis 1:27 indicates an emphasis on the creation of man. Now we see that man is defined within the context of this verse as “male and female.” This means that the Hebrew term *adam* is to be understood *in this passage* as a reference generically to humanity.

However, in Genesis 2:7 the same term *adam* is used to refer to the forming of Adam out of the dust of the “ground” (in Hebrew *adamah*—notice the play on words). Here only the male, Adam, is referred to, for Eve is not created until later and in an entirely different manner. Thus, in each passage, even within the context of two chapters, we see a differentiation between the definition of *adam* as “humanity” (*Gen. 1:27*) and the man Adam (*Gen. 2:7*). That Adam is a person is later affirmed in the genealogies (*Gen. 5:1–5, 1 Chron. 1:1, Luke 3:38*) and in reference to Jesus, who becomes the “second Adam” (*Rom. 5:12–14*).

Just as the word *Adam* occurs in a specific text, so the context of the creation of Adam and Eve is found in the larger Creation account as seen in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. This is what is meant by a larger unit. The unit informs the interpreter of additional themes, ideas, and developments. Genesis 2:4–25 has sometimes been called the second Creation account, but in fact there is only a difference in emphasis (see next week). In both accounts, though, we are shown the definitive origins of humanity.

As we can see, man and woman—humanity—are the direct creations of God. What does this tell us about how foolish the “wisdom of this world” (*1 Cor. 1:20*) truly is by teaching us that we arose from mere chance?

Books and Their Messages

The largest units in Scripture are books of the Bible. Biblical books were written for different purposes and in different settings. Some served as prophetic messages; others were compilations, such as the Psalms. There are historical books, such as 1 and 2 Kings, and there are letters to various churches, such as those written by Paul and others.

As we seek to understand a book's meaning and message, it is important to begin with authorship and setting. Many books of the Bible are assigned authors. The first five books of the Old Testament are identified as having been authored by Moses (*Josh. 8:31, 32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Kings 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Dan. 9:11–13; Mal. 4:4*). This is confirmed by Jesus (*Mark 12:26; John 5:46, 47; John 7:19*) and the apostles (*Acts 3:22, Rom. 10:5*). In other cases, some biblical authors are not identified. (For example, the authors of the books Esther and Ruth as well as the authors of many of the historical books, such as Samuel and Chronicles, are not identified.)

Read Genesis 15:1–5 and Genesis 22:17, 18. What significance is it to us that Moses wrote the book of Genesis?

Exodus through Deuteronomy were written by Moses after, of course, the Exodus. But because Genesis is foundational as a history of God's acts from Creation to the patriarchal period, it is logical that this book was written before the Exodus.

“As the years rolled on, and he [Moses] wandered with his flocks in solitary places, pondering upon the oppressed condition of his people, he recounted the dealings of God with his fathers and the promises that were the heritage of the chosen nation, and his prayers for Israel ascended by day and by night. Heavenly angels shed their light around him. Here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251.

With the book of Genesis, we are told not only about our origins but about the plan of salvation, or the means by which God will redeem fallen humanity. This plan becomes even more apparent with the covenant that God makes with Abraham, which involves His promise to establish through him a great nation to be made up of “ ‘descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore’ ” (*Gen. 22:17, NKJV*).

What other great truths have we been taught through the book of Genesis, truths about which we might otherwise not know? What does this teach us about how important the Word of God is to our faith?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “John Wycliffe,” pp. 79–96; “Luther Before the Diet,” pp. 145–170, in *The Great Controversy*; also read section 4.a.–j. from the document “Methods of Bible Study,” which can be found at the following link: www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/bible-interpretation-hermeneutics/methods-bible-study.

“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. . . . Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Regardless of how many translations of the Bible exist in your language, what can you do to make the most of what you have? How can you learn to cherish the Bible as the Word of God and to seek, by faith, to obey what it teaches?
- ② Think about the difference between what the Word of God teaches about human origins (that we were created by God on the sixth day of Creation) and what humanity itself, under the name of “science,” teaches, which is that we evolved over billions of years. What should this vast contrast between the two tell us about how important it is to stick to what the Bible teaches, and how far off humanity can get when it veers away from the Word of God and what it plainly teaches?
- ③ What Bible tools, if any, are available to you that can help you better understand the Bible? And even if you don’t have any extra tools, how can you learn to apply some of the lessons learned this week about how to interpret the Bible?
- ④ The children of Israel were told to teach their own children the great truths committed to them and to retell the stories about God’s leading in their lives (*Deut. 4:9*). Putting aside the obvious benefit of passing the faith on, what is it about the teaching and the telling of stories about God’s leading in our lives that tends to increase our own faith? That is, why is sharing biblical truth with others beneficial to ourselves, as well?

“I Have Chills!”

By KAMIL METZ

Liz was busy working in her home in Houston, Texas, United States, when suddenly something told her to be still for a moment. Just then, she heard a knock at the door.

When she opened the door, however, she didn't see anyone. David Pano already had left her porch and was swiftly walking to the next house. Seeing his retreating figure, Liz called out to let him know she was there. Pano heard her call and returned to her home.

He smiled and handed her a GLOW tract.

“Is this from a cult?” she asked.

Pano assured her that it was not and that it was just a Christian tract.

“I have chills right now!” Liz exclaimed. “Not too long ago I had a dream. In the dream, I saw two ministers of the gospel coming to my house sharing literature. And I knew that they were not a cult.”

Pano, a minister who works as assistant ministries director at the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Michigan Conference, was thrilled to hear about her dream. The only problem with its fulfillment, he quietly pondered, was that he was there by himself.

Just then, Taylor Hinkle (pictured), his ministry partner on that street, arrived. Hinkle, a chaplain and Bible teacher at Great Lakes Adventist Academy in Michigan, had run out of GLOW tracts on his side of the street, so he had come to Pano to get some more tracts. There were now two ministers of the gospel at her door!

Liz looked at Pano and Hinkle.

“I believe that this is from God,” she said. “In my dream, I saw two ministers at my door bringing hope to me. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is your last chance. I'm coming back soon!’”

“Please pray for me,” she said. “I need Jesus in my life.”

The two young ministers, who were going door to door with other young adults during GYC's annual convention in Houston on December 30, 2016, gladly prayed for her. Liz signed up to take Bible studies with a local church.



God sends His people as ministers of hope into this dark and gloomy world to introduce souls to the Source of hope. Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White wrote, “We are to minister to the despairing, and inspire hope in the hopeless” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 350). Why not choose today to be a minister of hope for Jesus?

TAYLOR HINKLE is pictured. KAMIL METZ is the international director for the GLOW ministry.