

THE HERMENEUTICS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

PART 2

THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF LAW

1. Laws of science help scientific comprehension.
2. Laws of Nature must be studied to learn the secrets of Nature.
3. Laws of health are an essential study for healthful living.
4. Laws of interpretation are indispensable tests in studying the bible to unearth its gems of truth.

To unearth its great gems of truth, she says:

“Its (the bible) great system of truth is not so presented as to be discerned by the hasty or careless reader. Many of its treasures lie far beneath the surface, and can be obtained only by diligent research and continuous effort. The truths that go to make up the great whole must be searched out and gathered up, “here a little, and there a little.” [Isaiah 28:10](#). When thus searched out and brought together, they will be found to be perfectly fitted to one another. Each Gospel is a supplement to the others, every prophecy an explanation of another, every truth a development of some other truth. (Education pg. 123, 124)

In 1906 Ellen White wrote a series of twenty short articles for *The Signs of the Times*, entitled “Our Great Treasure – House in which, in some articles, she refers to the way that the bible should be studied.

“The bible is its own expositor; therefore, scripture should be compared with scripture” (ST March 21, 1906)

“We should study one text or passage until its meaning is clear rather than read many chapters with no definite purpose in view”. (ST March 26, Oct. 3, 1906)

One of the most common mistakes in understanding the meaning scripture is not to examine the literary context.

LITERARY CONTEXT

The literary context refers to the text(s) immediately preceding and following a text or passage under investigation. Interpretation of a text without attention to the immediate

context often leads to wrong conclusions.

Ellen White was well aware of the importance of paying attention to the context.

She wrote:

“In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite.” (GC 521)

This mistake also occurs in the reading of her writings.

She states:

“I know that many take the testimonies the Lord has given, and apply them as they suppose they should be applied, picking out a sentence here and there, taking it from its proper connection and apply it according to their idea.” (TM pg. 62)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ellen White recognized the importance of the historical and cultural setting of a passage. She also understood the meaning the text had for the original recipients was a prerequisite for a deeper understanding.

“An understanding of the customs of those who lived in Bible times, of the location and time of events, is practical knowledge; for it aids in making clear the figures of the Bible and in bringing out the force of Christ’s lessons.” (CT 518.3)

The historical context provide answers to such questions as

1. When was the biblical book written?
2. Who was the human author?
3. To whom was the book originally addressed?
4. What was the author’s purpose?
5. At which time and in which geographical location did the events described in this book happened?
6. What was the political, economic and social situation at that time?

7. What do we know about the religious background and situation?
8. Which customs were prevailing?
9. How did people live, work and support themselves?
10. What did they eat?

The historical context is very helpful and very much needed to gain a better understanding of the text under investigation.

The passage of scripture we will study, both the context and historical setting will be applied.

A TEST CASE

Acts 3:19

“¹⁹ Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

Question: Is the passage referring to the blotting out of sins from the heavenly sanctuary or some other meaning.

ACTS 3:V19

- (1a) “Repent and be converted”
- (1b) “That your sins may be blotted out”
- (1c) “When the times of refreshing

Clearly by the literary context and the self-interpreting of scripture the blotting out of sin is the remission or deliverance from sin.

The Greek work for “Remission is “Aphesis” which means, deliverance, liberty, forgiveness, pardon.

The Greek word for “blotted out” is “Exaleipho” which means to obliterate, wipe out, pardon.

But what does Acts 3: V19 mean to us today? We are living in the anti - typical day of atonement and the Investigative Judgement for the dead who have professed faith in Christ. Their cases will come in review and their sins will be blotted out from the heavenly sanctuary, so long as they endure and maintain their faith in Christ to the end. For those who are alive and reach the stage of the ear will receive the latter rain to empower them to give the final warning message. Their cases will come up while alive in the face of the image and mark of the beast test, by which their destiny will be sealed and their sins blotted out from the heavenly sanctuary.

To find out what the inspired writer meant to the audience to whom the words were addressed, we must exegete the text by asking:

1. What is the historical backdrop of Acts 3? Peter’s healing of a lame man who could not walk. (v2-6)
2. Who spoke the words and to whom were they addressed in v19? Peter spoke the words to the men of Israel (v12)
3. Why did Peter call the men of Israel to repent v19? Because of their rejection and murder of the Son of God. (v13 – 15)
4. What therefore is the primary historical meaning of the blotting out of sins in V19? It becomes quite obvious that the blotting out sins on Peter’s call to repentance to the men of Israel is the forgiveness of sins and the times of refreshing which is the reception of the Holy Spirit.

This meaning can be compared with Acts 2:v38.

Acts 3:19 compared Acts 2:38.

ACTS 2:V38

- (1a) “Repent and be baptized”
- (1b) “For the remission of sins”
- (1c) “And ye shall receive the gift shall come” of the Holy Ghost”

THE LAW OF FIRST MENTION

This rule of interpretation says if you want to understand the meaning of a word or phrase found in the latter part of scripture you have to find where it is mentioned in the earlier part of scripture.

We note the self-interpretation of scripture from the pen of inspiration.

“The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident.” (FE. Pg. 187)

THE APOCALYPTIC SEAL OF REVELATION 7

In Revelation seven verse 2, John speaks of “*the seal of the living God*”. What does John the Revelator mean by this

phrase in the book end of scripture?

According to the law of first mention, we must establish what the word seal meant where it is mentioned in the earlier part of scripture and in the trajectory forward see how the inspired writers understood it's meaning. By the time you reach the book end of scripture in Revelation 7 you would have a full orb understanding of its meaning.

Esther 8:v8

“8 Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.”

In this passage two concepts emerge.

1. Authority
2. Permanency

The king's ring carried the symbol of his authority and his authority was absolute.

The laws of the Medes and Persians when authenticated by the king could not be altered. (Dan. 6:v8)

Other references for your personal study:

1 Kings 21:v8; Nehemiah 9:v38; Song of Solomon 8:v6; Isaiah 8:v25; Daniel 9:v24; 12:v4; John 3:v33; Romans 4:v11; 1 Corinthians 9:v2; 2 Timothy 2:v19; Revelation 7:v2.

THOUGHT VS VERBAL INSPIRATION

Verbal Inspiration:

In this view it is believed that God dictated the words that the bible writers faithfully recorded. Thus the words of scripture themselves are inspired. The bible writers were His pen.

Thought Inspiration

In thought inspiration it is believed that God works through the mental processes of the writers, inspiring the thoughts, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit allowing the prophet to choose the way the thoughts are to be expressed.

In the ministry of Ellen White she pointed Adventist leading thinkers and the church in general away from verbal inspiration. Her inspiration was the same as any of the bible writers. Thus she says:

“Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the

Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation. —“ISM pg.37.1)

She says of the bible writers:

“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. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. ISM 21.1

“In daily study the verse-by-verse method is often most helpful. Let the student take one verse, and concentrate the mind on ascertaining the thought that God has put into that verse for him, and then dwell upon the thought until it becomes his own. One passage thus studied until its significance is clear is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. – Ed. 189.4

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 and thoughts 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.—[Manuscript 24, 1886](#) (written in Europe in 1886).” ISM 21.2

THE WRATH OF GOD (ROMANS 1:18)

Paul says the wrath of God is revealed. To reveal something is to make its meaning known and understood. Some interpret Paul to mean God has inflicted His wrath.

Paul did not say that God has inflicted His wrath, but that His wrath has been revealed. In other words, God has shown how His wrath is exercised.

Paul explains that God's wrath in v18 is exercised by “God.... gave them up” (v24), “God gave them up (v26), God gave them over” (v28).

The amplified version says:

V24 “God gave them up in ... abandoning them”

V26 God gave them over and abandoned them”

Romans Chapter 1 is a revelation of how God’s wrath operates. It works by abandoning the unrepentant sinner to the power of his sin and its consequences. This is exactly how God executes His wrath.

Do the Old Testament writers agree with Paul?

“And I will pour out my indignation on you, I will blow against you in the fire of my wrath, and deliver you into the hand of brutish men, and skillful to destroy.” Eze. 21:31

“For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, said the LORD your Redeemer.” Isa. 54:7, 8

“Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. 22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath against us.” Lam. 5:20-22

Though not all scholars and theologians in the SDA Church hold to thought inspiration, those who do, understand that inspiration acts on the mind, giving the inspired writer the freedom to express the inspired thoughts, dreams, visions, in his or her own words. Knowing this, one must find out what the words mean by an exegetical study of the passage of Holy write.

SDA Exegetical and Expository commentary Vol. 6 pg. 477-478

“The wrath of God”. That is the divine displeasure against sin, resulting ultimately in the abandonment of man to the judgement of death (see Rom. 6:23; John 3:36). The wrath of the Infinite God must not be compared to human passion. God is love (1 John 4:8) and though He hates sin, He loves the sinner (SC 54). However God does not force His love upon those who are unwilling to receive His mercy. (See DA. 22, 466, 759). Thus God’s wrath against sin is exercised in the withdrawal of His presence and life giving power from those who choose to remain in sin and thus share in its inevitable consequences. (See Gen. 6:3, DA. 107, 763; SC 17, 18)

This is illustrated by the terrible experience of the Jews after

the rejection of Christ. Since they had become confirmed in their stubborn impenitence and had refused the last offers of mercy, “God withdrew His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen.” (GC. 28)

When God’s wrath against sin fell upon Christ our substitute, it was the separation from His father that caused Him the greatest anguish. “This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequence of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.” (DA. 686). Finally on the cross “the wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation...the withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish placed His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man.” (DA. 753)

Thus as Paul explains in Rom. 1:24, 26, 28, God reveals His wrath by turning impenitent men over to the inevitable results of their rebellion. This persistent resistance of God’s love and mercy culminates in the final revelation of God’s wrath on that day when the Spirit of God is at last withdrawn. Unsheltered from divine grace, the wicked have no protection from the evil one. “As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose.” (GC. 614). Then fire comes down from God out of heaven and sin and sinners are forever destroyed. (Rev. 20:9, Mal. 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10)

But even this final revelation of God’s wrath in the destruction of the wicked is not an act of arbitrary power. “God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separated from God and this cuts himself off from life” (DA. 764)

God gives men existence for a time so that they may develop their characters. When this has been accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. “By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire” (GC. 548)

SUMMARY

The doctrinal system that is bequeath to us today with its ever increasing clarity is grounded in sound principles of interpretation. As students of the bible, we must be faithful to those principles.