A Interpreting the Bible with the Bible

- The Bible is its best interpreter.
  - *Interpreted in its own text:* For example, Daniel explains the meaning of his vision by saying that the beasts he saw are kingdoms (Dan. 7:3, 17)
  - *Interpreted by another prophet:* Ezra interpreted the meaning of the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 25:11-12; 2Ch. 36:22-23)
  - *The New Testament interprets the Old:* Matthew interpreted the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:22-23)
- Jesus not only interpreted the Old Testament, but gave it its true meaning, going beyond its literal meaning (Matthew 5).

B The historical context

- Will children die and will there be sinners in the new earth? (Is. 65:17-20)
- Interpreted in the light of the apocalyptic prophecies of the New Testament, Isaiah's prophecy is not only shocking, but contradictory (Rev. 21:1-4).
- We must understand that the historical context of Isaiah is one thing, and that of Revelation is another. Isaiah spoke of the future of Israel when it accepted the Messiah. In John's time, however, Israel had rejected the Messiah. The context had changed.
- If Israel had accepted the Messiah, there would have been a significant change: the redemption and transformation of the Earth and humanity would have begun gradually. Holy men would have lived as long as trees (Isaiah 65:22), and animals would be less aggressive in the holy land (Isaiah 65:25).
- Then, in the end, the dead would rise and death would cease to exist (Isaiah 26:19; 25:8). Only this last part of Isaiah's prophecies will be fulfilled literally, since it does not depend on Israel's decision.

C The cultural context

- In the Roman Empire, as in many places today, greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek was commonplace. In that cultural context, Paul's advice was sound (1 Cor. 16:20).
- However, in Japanese culture – for example – physical contact in public is generally avoided, so it usually generates surprise, strangeness or discomfort in most people.
- Given that, in that cultural context, following Paul's advice will generate rejection among people, we must extrapolate his advice by adapting it to their context.
- If we are in Japan, or in other parts of the world (Thailand, Tibet, New Zealand, ...), let us greet each other with the culturally correct greeting, thus demonstrating our fraternal affection.

D The literary context

- A popular saying goes that “a text without context is a pretext.” In other words, using a text in isolation can lead to a personalized interpretation that suits our own tastes and is generally far removed from correct biblical teaching.
- What is the context of a biblical text?
  - The immediate context consists of the verses before and after the text.
  - A broader context is the chapter where the text is located.
  - We can further expand the context by taking into account the entire book in which it is found.
- Psalm 91:11-12 speaks of God's protection from external dangers. Taking it out of context and quoting it incompletely, Satan tried to get Jesus to deliberately put himself in danger by using this text as a pretext (Matthew 4:6).

E Find out the meaning of the text

- ❖ Everyone should understand the Bible for themselves. It is clear enough for everyone to grasp the path to salvation, yet complex enough to constantly challenge even the most brilliant minds. Scripture is an inexhaustible treasure trove of knowledge about salvation.
- ❖ But every correct interpretation of the biblical text must adhere to certain rules:
  - — We must understand the words of the text (if possible, using the original languages or different translations)
  - — Respect all contexts of the text (historical, cultural and literary)
  - — Compare with parallel passages (such as the Gospels), or passages that deal with the same subject
  - — The final interpretation must be in accordance with the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

F Thematic Bible Study

- ❖ For a Christian, Bible study is not optional. We must always grow in the knowledge of God's will, allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit in the study of His Word (John 16:13).
- ❖ Furthermore, we must "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1Peter 3:15).
- ❖ Studying the Bible thematically will equip us to present the message to others, whether by giving Bible studies or preaching the Word.
- ❖ It is also important to maintain a humble attitude in order to take advantage of the biblical knowledge of other people from whom we can learn.
- ❖ Although we do not know the full content, we know that Jesus gave a Bible study to two people about His messianic work based on various biblical passages (Luke 24:25-27).

APPENDIX: INTERPRETING THE TEXTS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

When studying the writings of Ellen G. White, we must follow the same guidelines as when studying biblical texts.

Statements such as "We will have to account for the money invested in bicycles" (TM 398), must be understood in the historical context (the price of a bicycle in 1890 was equivalent to several months' salary).

Using isolated paragraphs out of their literary context makes Ellen say what she never meant to say, or defend a doctrinal point contrary to what she believed and taught.

Before reaching a conclusion, we must study everything she taught on a specific topic, and not just rely on a few quotes.

On the other hand, we must ask ourselves: Did she really write what I'm being told? Always verify that the quote is real and accurate (use the official website https://egwwritings.org/).