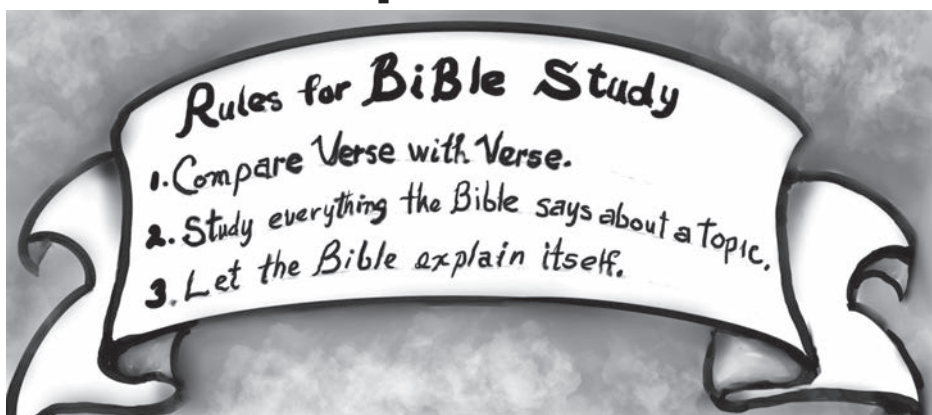


Some Important Rules



SABBATH—MARCH 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 24:15; Psalm 139:1–6; Daniel 12:4; Matthew 5:18; Daniel 7:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But if someone wants to brag, let him brag about this: Let him brag that he understands and knows me. Let him brag that I am the Lord. Let him brag that I am kind [loving] and fair. Let him brag that I do things that are right [good] on earth. This kind [type] of bragging pleases me,’ says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:24, ICB).

MOST CHRISTIANS don't agree about the meaning of the Bible's special messages about the future. So, non-Christians often think that the Bible's end-time messages are a waste of time. If Christians can't agree about what the messages mean, why should anyone bother reading them? Sad to say, many Christians start to think that Bible books with special messages about the end times can't be understood. So, they don't read them.

Things used to be different. For many hundreds of years, most Christians understood the Bible's special messages about the future. Most Christians agreed about what the special messages meant. God wants His children to understand His special messages: “Christian brothers, I ask you with all my heart in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to agree among yourselves. Do not be divided into little groups. Think and act as if you all had the same mind [thoughts]” (1 Corinthians 1:10, NLV). This week, we will look at some important rules that will help us to understand the meaning of God's end-time messages.



For many hundreds of years, most Christians understood the Bible's special messages about the future.

LET THE READER UNDERSTAND (Matthew 24:15)

Walk into any Christian bookstore and look at the books about the Bible's special messages about the end times. Soon you will see that the writers have many different ideas. These ideas make you think that no one can really understand what the book of Revelation is saying. One example is the topic of the antichrist. The antichrist is God's enemy. The writer of one book about the Bible's end-time messages says that the antichrist is not real. The antichrist is only a word picture. Another writer says that the antichrist is something or someone who lived in the days of the Kingdom of Rome. Some people believe that you can use the Bible to support any idea you want.

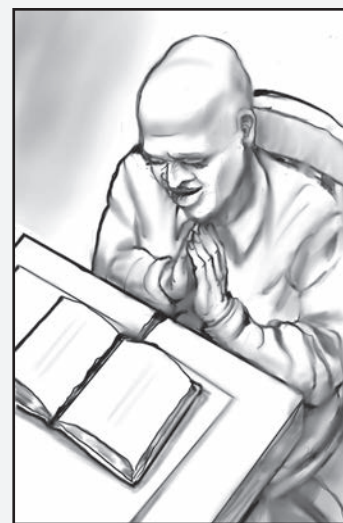
But the Bible itself doesn't support these false ideas. The Bible invites us to read and learn. The Bible teaches us that we can know and understand the things God says to us in the Bible.

Read Matthew 24:15; Revelation 1:3; Matthew 11:29; and Jeremiah 9:23, 24. What do these verses teach us about God's plan for us to understand Bible truth?

Many universities teach students about how to read the Bible. The professors who teach these classes may not believe in the Bible. They think the stories can teach us good behavior. But they don't believe the stories really happened or that they are God's words to us.

So, these professors read the Bible, but they don't believe it comes from God. Other people read the Bible and teach things about it that go against the Bible's own message. So, we must be careful when we study the Bible. We must give our hearts and lives to Jesus first. If we don't, we may not understand the Bible's message and what it teaches us about God. We can misunderstand the Bible more easily than we think. That's why we must read the Bible with the right spirit and with the Holy Spirit's help.

Some people read the Bible just so they can find excuses and reasons not to believe in its message. Why is this behavior and thinking so wrong?



We must be careful when we study the Bible. We must give our hearts and lives to Jesus first.

GOD WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND HIM (Psalm 139:1–6)

Did you ever need to communicate with someone in a foreign country where you couldn't speak the language very well? You know what you want to say. But you don't have the vocabulary to say what you need to say.

God has a different problem when He tries to talk with us. God says, " 'The heavens are higher than the earth. And my ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are higher than your thoughts' " (Isaiah 55:9, NIV). The problem isn't that God doesn't have the vocabulary to talk with us. The problem is that we don't have the vocabulary or the mind to understand God fully.

What do the verses below teach us about God's understanding? How does God's understanding compare with our own?

Psalm 139:1–6 _____

Psalm 147:5 _____

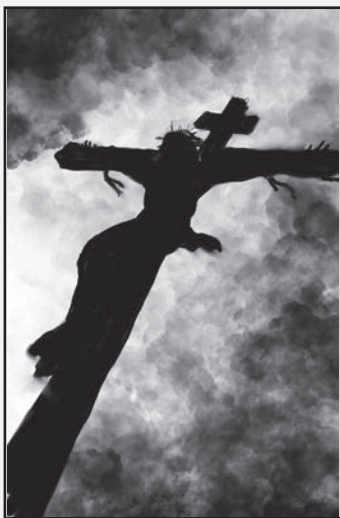
Romans 11:33 _____

1 John 3:20 _____

For sure, we can't fully understand the mind of God. God has no beginning and no end. God knows everything. We can't understand everything about the things He made. So, how can we understand Him fully? We can't.

Maybe we can't understand everything. But we can understand the things that we need to know about God's saving mercy (read 2 Timothy 3:14, 15). The end-time messages in the Bible can teach us a lot about God's plan to save us. In the end, God's special messages must lead us to Jesus and His promise to save us. Jesus offers this promise to everyone.

The Lord Jesus made everything (read Colossians 1:16; John 1:1–3). He came down to this earth and then offered Himself for our sins on the cross. Jesus died for even the worst one of us. That is how much God loves us all. Because Jesus died for each of us, He wants everyone, the worst of us included, to be saved. God wants us all to know what He offers us in Jesus. The special messages in the Bible help us to know what God offers us.



The end-time messages in the Bible can teach us a lot about God's plan to save us.

**“DANIEL, KEEP THIS MESSAGE A SECRET”
(Daniel 12:4, ERV)**

Read Daniel 12:4. What was the Lord telling Daniel to do in this verse? (Compare with Revelation 22:10.)

Many preachers believe that Daniel 12:4 teaches that our knowledge about science will grow very fast, just before Jesus comes back. Some preachers also say that Daniel 12:4 talks about how people in the end times will invent new ways to travel fast from place to place. Many of our own Adventist books teach these same ideas. For sure, these things did happen. At the same time, could Daniel 12:4 have another meaning?

Read the verse again. The first thing the angel tells Daniel to do is to “ ‘keep this message a secret’ ” (Daniel 12:4, ERV). What message is the angel talking about? The message is the book of Daniel itself. So, maybe the knowledge that will grow more and more in the end times is the knowledge we will get about the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel is different from the book of Revelation. The Lord told John not to keep his book a secret (Revelation 22:10). God wanted His people to understand the book of Revelation from the start because “all these things will happen soon” (Revelation 1:3, NLV). Compare this verse with Daniel 12:4, which tells us that God’s people will understand the book of Daniel more clearly at a time faraway in the future.

Many Christian thinkers in the past tried to explain the book of Daniel. Some of these thinkers enjoyed much success in their studies. But people started to understand much more about the book of Daniel after the end of the 1,260-year special message about time. This special message about time ended in A.D. 1798. At that time, many Christian thinkers worldwide started to believe that something important was going to happen around 1843. William Miller was the most famous of these thinkers. His preaching caused people everywhere to get ready for the Second Coming. The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of this time. People began to understand the Three Angels’ Messages better.

Think about how many Christians don’t understand important Bible truth for this time. Most Christians worship on Sunday, and not on the Sabbath. Many Christians believe that the dead continue to live on after their bodies die. Or they believe the dead burn forever in hell. So, we should be thankful for all the Bible truth God gave our church.



William Miller’s preaching caused people everywhere to get ready for the Second Coming.

STUDYING THE BIBLE (Matthew 5:18)



We must not choose to study only a few verses on a topic. We must carefully study everything the Bible says about that topic.

Seventh-day Adventists owe much to William Miller for their understanding of end-time happenings in the Bible. Miller didn't have a correct understanding of some important verses about the end times. One of those verses was Daniel 8:14. But Miller understood how to study the Bible's special messages about the future. His understanding about these messages helped to start the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Read Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; and Luke 24:27. What do these verses teach us about the way we should study the Bible's special messages about the future?

Many Christians make a mistake when they study the Bible. They will use a verse in the Bible to explain what is happening on the news. But these Christians don't compare the verse to the rest of the Bible to understand its meaning. Then they write books about the future that need to be rewritten every few years. That's because the writers were wrong in the first place about what they said was going to happen and when it would happen.

So, it's very important to know how to study the Bible correctly. We must not choose to study only a few verses on a topic. We must carefully study everything the Bible says about that topic. We also must think about why the verse was written and when it was written. This knowledge helps us to understand what the Bible is really saying. Then we will not make the Bible say whatever we want.

Do you know people who use only certain verses of the Bible to prove their belief in something? These same people pay no attention to the rest of the Bible and its teachings on the topic. Why is this thinking wrong? What is the best way to study the Bible?

WORD PICTURE OR REAL EXPERIENCE? (Daniel 7:7)

When we study the Bible's special messages about the future, we must know when the Bible is talking about a symbol or when the Bible is talking about a real experience. So, how do we decide if a Bible writer is talking in symbols or word pictures? How do we know what the symbols really mean? The best way to know is to see how other writers use that same symbol or word picture all through the Bible. We must not look at how that symbol or word picture is used in modern times today. Some people think that the bear in Daniel 7 is a symbol for Russia. Why? Because many people use the bear today as a symbol for that country. But we must not follow this plan when we study the Bible's special messages.

Look up the following verses. What symbol do you see in each verse, and what does the symbol mean? Remember, allow the Bible to explain itself.

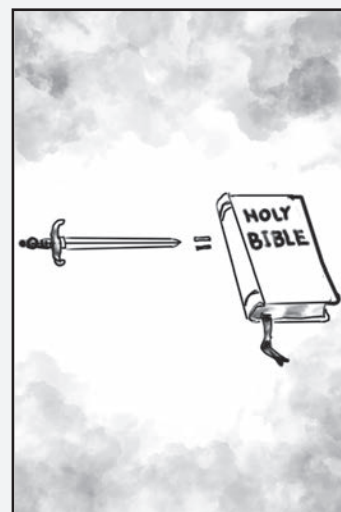
Daniel 7:7; Daniel 8:3; Daniel 7:24 _____

Revelation 1:16; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12 _____

Revelation 12:1; Revelation 21:2; Ephesians 5:31, 32; Jeremiah 6:2 _____

Again, we must let the Bible explain itself. When we follow this simple rule, then many of our problems with understanding the Bible will disappear. Here are some examples: the Bible shows us that a horn can be a symbol for a government or a country. A sword can be a symbol for the Bible. A woman can be a symbol for the church.

So, why does God talk to us in symbols and word pictures in the Bible? God may have many reasons for choosing to communicate with symbols. One example is the book of Revelation that uses Babylon as a symbol for Rome. If the Bible named Rome as the cause of so much evil, then the church could have suffered worse from Rome than it already suffered. Whatever the reasons, we can trust that God wants us to understand what the symbols mean.



A sword can be a symbol for the Bible.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “An American Reformer,” pages 319–324, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Pastors and people taught that no one could understand the special messages in the books of Daniel and the Revelation. But Jesus told His followers to read the words Daniel wrote about the things that would happen in their lifetime. Jesus said, ‘You who read this [Daniel 9:27] should understand what it means.’ Matthew 24:15 [ERV]. The name of the book of Revelation tells us that God wants us to understand this book: ‘This is the revelation [an opening up; a making known of the Bible truth that was hidden] of [about; from] Jesus Christ. God gave this revelation to Jesus, to show His servants what must soon happen. And Jesus sent His angel to show His message to His servant John. John has told everything that he has seen. It is the truth that Jesus Christ told him; it is the message from God. The one who reads the words of God’s message is happy. And the people who hear this message and do what is written in it are happy. The time is near when all of this will happen.’ Revelation 1:1–3 [ICB]. . . .

“So no one should teach other people that the book of Revelation is a mystery that people can’t understand. The book of Revelation is a mystery that God explains. The book of Revelation will help us remember the book of Daniel. Together, both books give us important lessons and teachings from God. These lessons and teachings show us what will happen at the end of this earth’s history.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 341, adapted.



“‘Jesus sent His angel to show His message to His servant John.’”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In what ways does the study of the Bible’s special messages about the future help make your faith strong? What reasons does Daniel 2 give us to trust God and His knowledge about the future?
- ② How do we protect ourselves from the many false ideas about the Bible’s special messages? Sometimes these false ideas come from our own church. Why must we be careful to “test everything. Keep what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, ERV)?

"I WANT THAT BOOK!"

Tim was a new Bible worker, and he was afraid. He was selling Christian books on a mostly non-Christian island in Southeast Asia. Tim didn't want any trouble with the citizens on the island.

Tim walked down a street and prayed. Then he entered a sewing shop. Tim saw four people standing in line ahead of him.

Tim waited his turn to talk with the shopkeeper. Maybe she would be interested in buying Tim's books. Tim waited a long time. Tim wanted to leave, but something stopped him.

Tim noticed that the shopkeeper kept staring at him with a strange look on her face. From time to time, she moved over to one side of the counter that was close to the wall so she could look around the other customers and get a better look at his face.

Finally, the last customer left the store except for Tim. But before he could say a word, the shopkeeper pointed to the books sticking out of his bag. She said, "I want that book! I want that book, and I want that book!"

Tim said, "What?! How do you know that I have books for sale?"

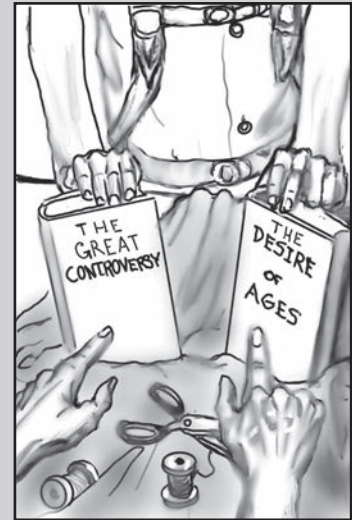
The shopkeeper said, "I had a dream. In the dream, I saw a young man who looked the same as you. He had books with him that I needed to read. One of those books was named *The Great Controversy*. So, I knew that you were going to come. I knew that I must buy *The Great Controversy*. Do you have that book?"

Tim's fears about having trouble as a Bible worker disappeared in an instant. He grew excited about selling books. He saw the truth of Deuteronomy 31:8, which says, "'The LORD will lead you. He himself is with you. He will not fail you or leave you. Don't worry. Don't be afraid!'" (ERV). Tim knew that God went ahead of him. God made the way ready for Tim to share the Good News about Jesus and His soon coming.

Pray for Tim and other Bible workers who are trying to reach people groups in Southeast Asia, where this story happened. Thank you for your 13th Sabbath Offering this quarter that will help share the Good News about Jesus in Southeast Asia.

INSIDE *Story*

by LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN



**"I want that book!
I want that book, and
I want that book!"**