

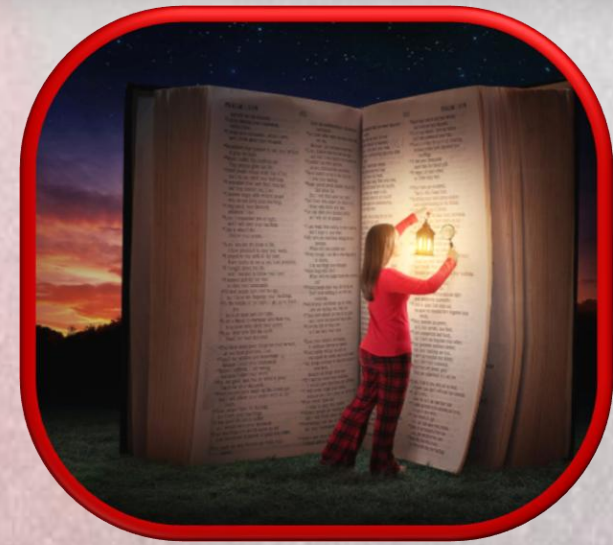
HELPFUL PRINCIPLES FOR STUDYING PROPHECIES



Author: Jacques Doukhan (Bible Study Guide, 2nd Quarter 2025, Auxiliary Material)

Undeniably, one of the most important tools needed when approaching the Scriptures is the one tool of which, all too often it would seem, we have the least: time. Once we are ready and willing to invest time in the enterprise of studying the Bible, we are then led to consider the following question: How do we read the Bible? That is, what are the principles that should guide us on the path of searching and understanding this particular Book?

We'll examine ten helpful principles for approaching biblical prophecy. Five focus on the text itself, and five focus on our response to the text.



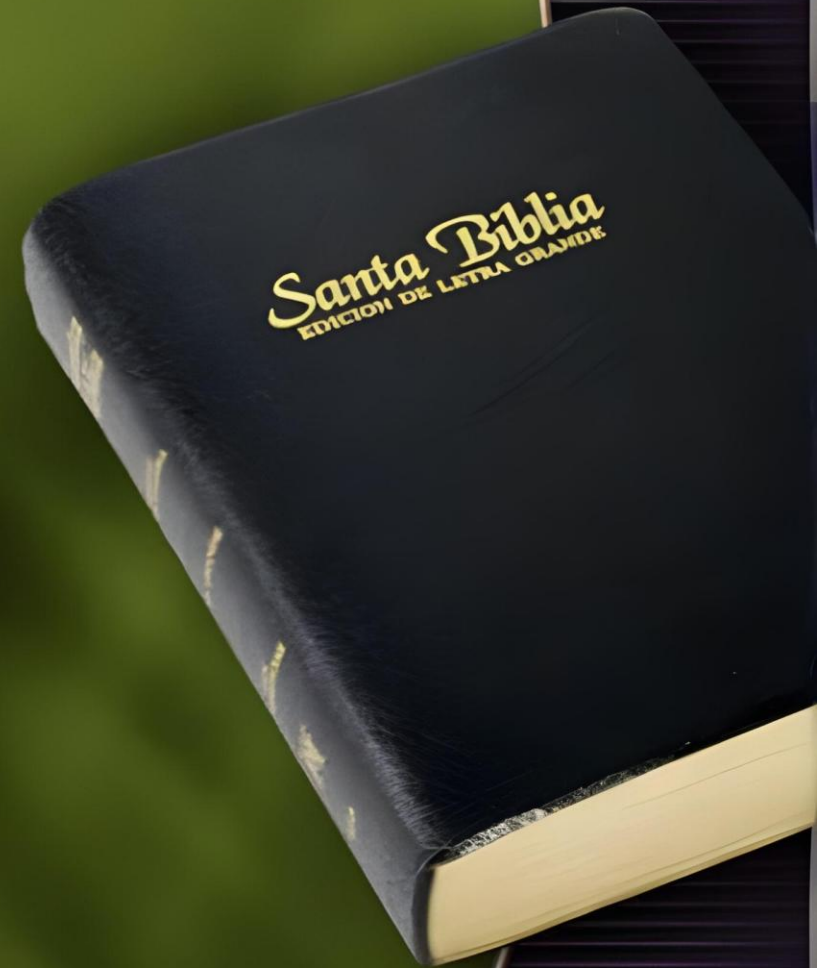
Focused on the text itself

1. Reading it candidly (as a new text)
2. Reading it carefully (as an important text)
3. Reading it esthetically (as a beautiful text)
4. Reading it contextually (within its biblical setting)
5. Reading it intertextually (in light of other biblical passages)

Focused on our response to the text

1. Reading the text spiritually (as an inspired text)
2. Reading it intelligently (as a difficult text)
3. Reading it corporately (as a text for the community)
4. Reading it existentially (as a text that engages our lives)
5. Reading it ethically (for a responsible interpretation)

FOCUSED ON
THE TEXT
ITSELF



ATTENTION TO THE TEXT: READING CANDIDLY

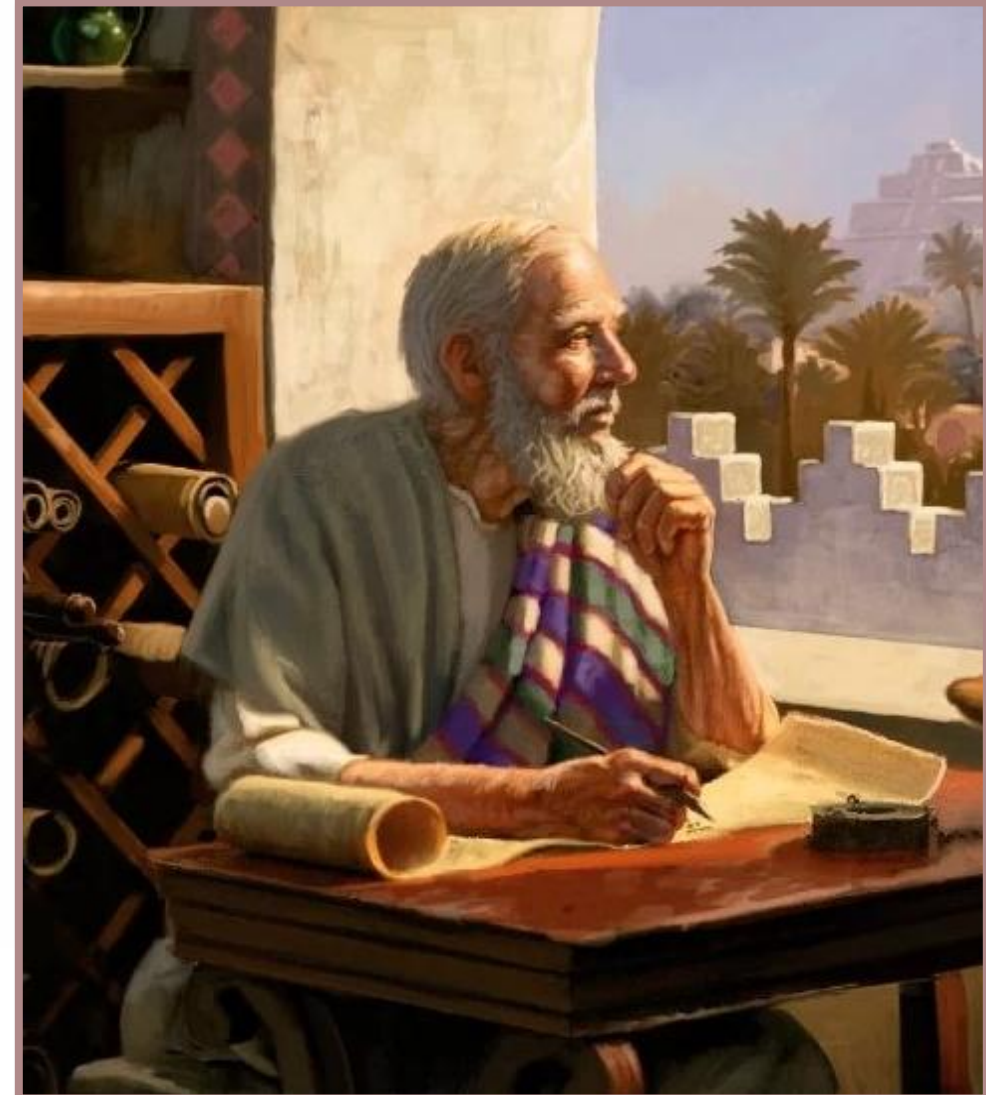
Read the text as if it were a new text that you do not understand.

It is interesting that Daniel himself began to understand his prophecy, in Daniel 9:2, only after he recognized that he did not understand it: “it was beyond understanding” (Dan. 8:27, NIV). Humans, the Bible tells us, are naturally in “darkness” (John 1:5, NKJV).

Indeed, the most common temptation when we approach Bible prophecy is to believe that we understand its message, even before having read the text.

Thus, we impose our thought onto the text (eisegesis), instead of permitting the text to speak for itself (exegesis).

This is the case when we read Bible prophecy from the point of view of our own reasoning or in the light of events that happen in our time.



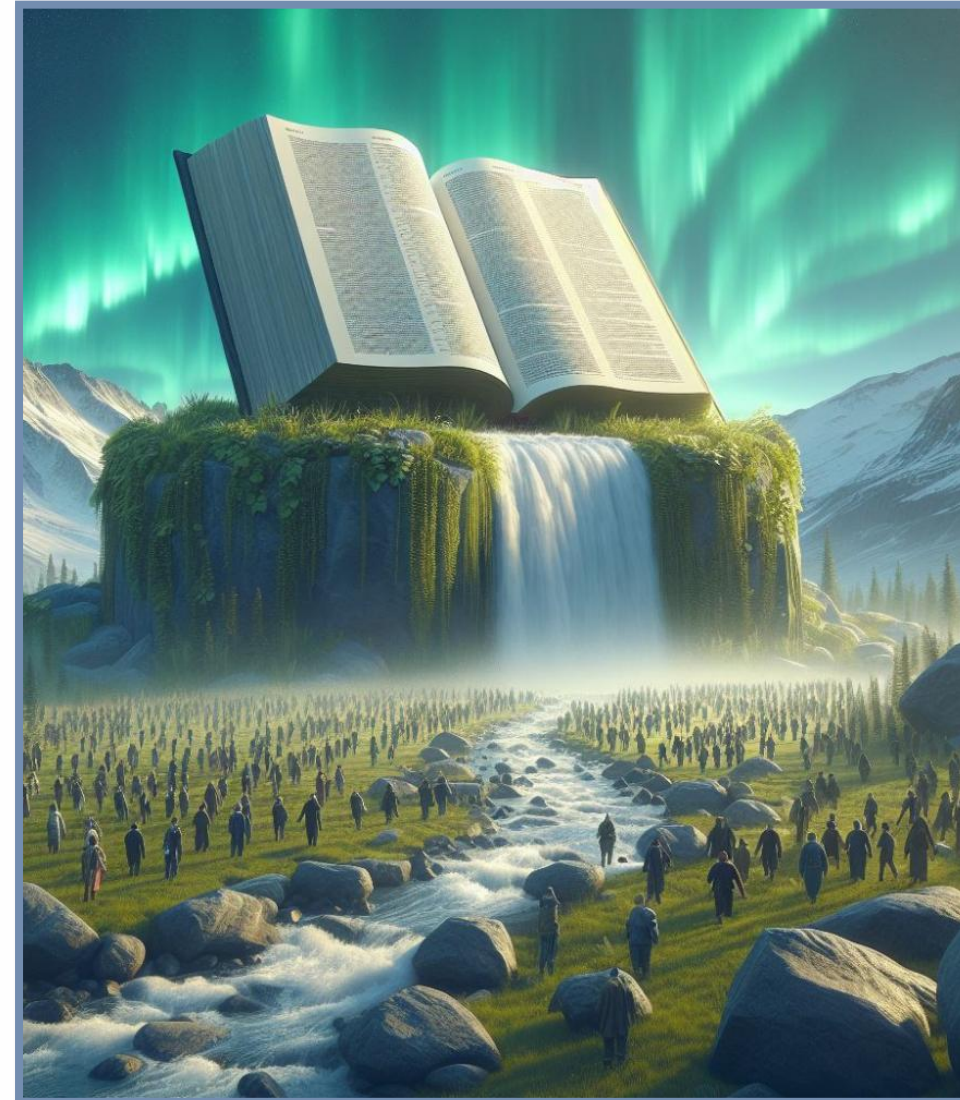
ATTENTION TO THE TEXT: READING CAREFULLY

Bible prophecy contains important information about the fate of the world and vital truths of salvation (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

The Bible prophets carefully chose their words and forms of expression to convey their inspired vision.

Therefore, read the text slowly, paying close attention to its words. Read it several times to ensure that nothing is missed in the reading of the text. Thus, “we shall find living springs bubbling up where the careless reader discerns only a desert.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 191.

It is preferable to recognize that you do not understand something than to content yourself with a shallow or false understanding of a text.

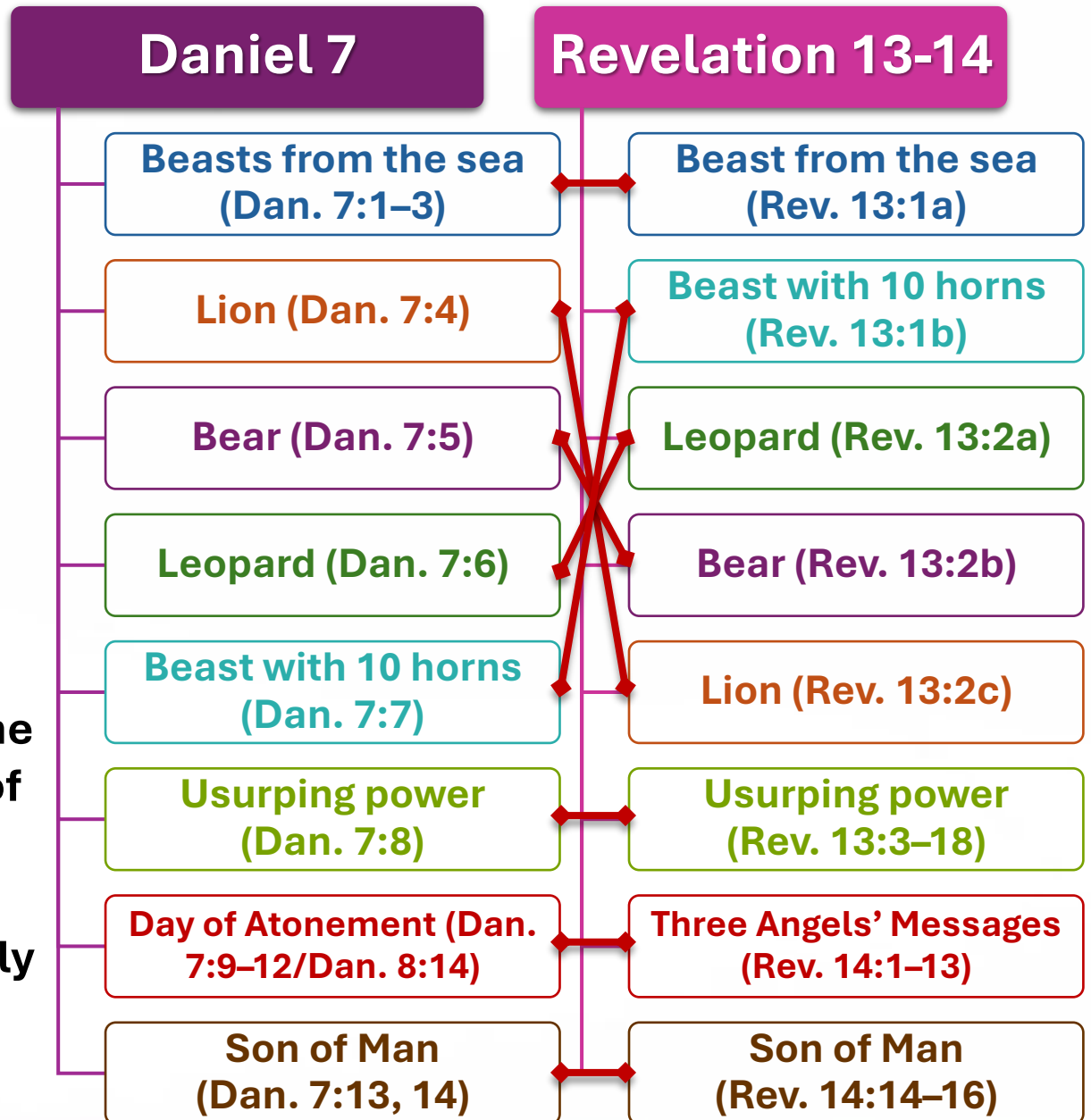


ATTENTION TO THE TEXT: READING ESTHETICALLY

The literary forms of the text (its structure, its parallelisms) will aid in deciphering the message of prophecy. Daniel's prophecy of the image in Daniel 2 is clarified by its parallel with Daniel's prophecy of the four beasts in Daniel 7. There are also parallels between prophecies in the book of Daniel and in the book of Revelation. See the following chart in which the apocalyptic vision in Revelation 13, 14 parallels, in many respects, the prophecy of Daniel 7, which also parallels the prophecy of Daniel 8, as follows:



The present parallels show that the heavenly Day of Atonement/Day of Judgment, in Daniel 7 and 8, corresponds to, and is contemporaneous with, the earthly proclamation of the three angels' messages, in Revelation 14.



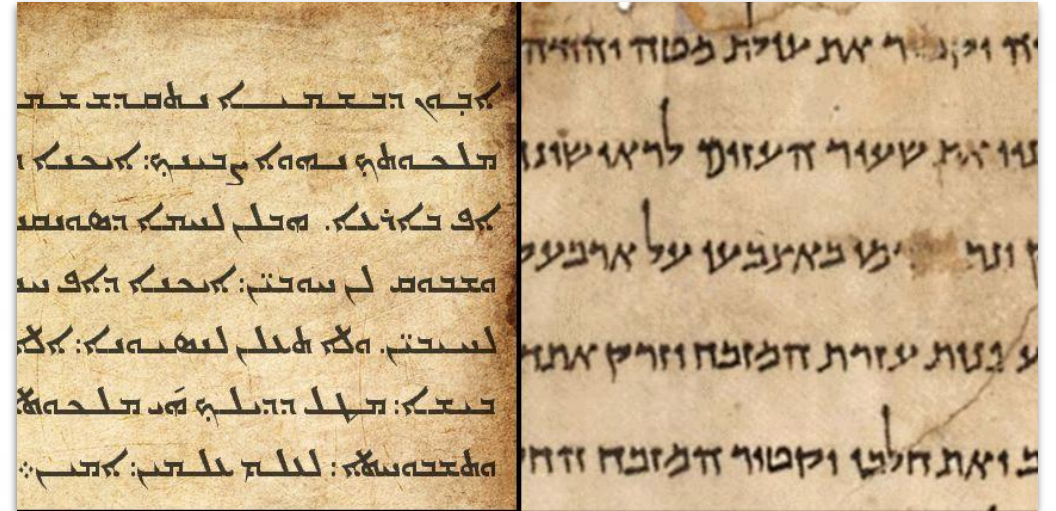
ATTENTION TO THE TEXT: READING CONTEXTUALLY

Daniel 11 in its historical context



The event of the military encounter between the northern Babylonian army and the southern Egyptian army in Carchemish (compare Dan. 1:1 with Jer. 46:2) will be used by the prophet Daniel as a template for his prophecy of the eschatological wars between the king of the north and the king of the south, in chapter 11.

Daniel 7 and 8 in its literary context



The fact that Daniel 7 is written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of that time, while Daniel 8 is written in Hebrew, the language of Israel, indicates that the prophecy of Daniel 7 focuses on the kingdoms of the earth and has universal impact, while the prophecy of Daniel 8 focuses on God's people and has a spiritual impact.

ATTENTION TO THE TEXT: READING INTERTEXTUALLY

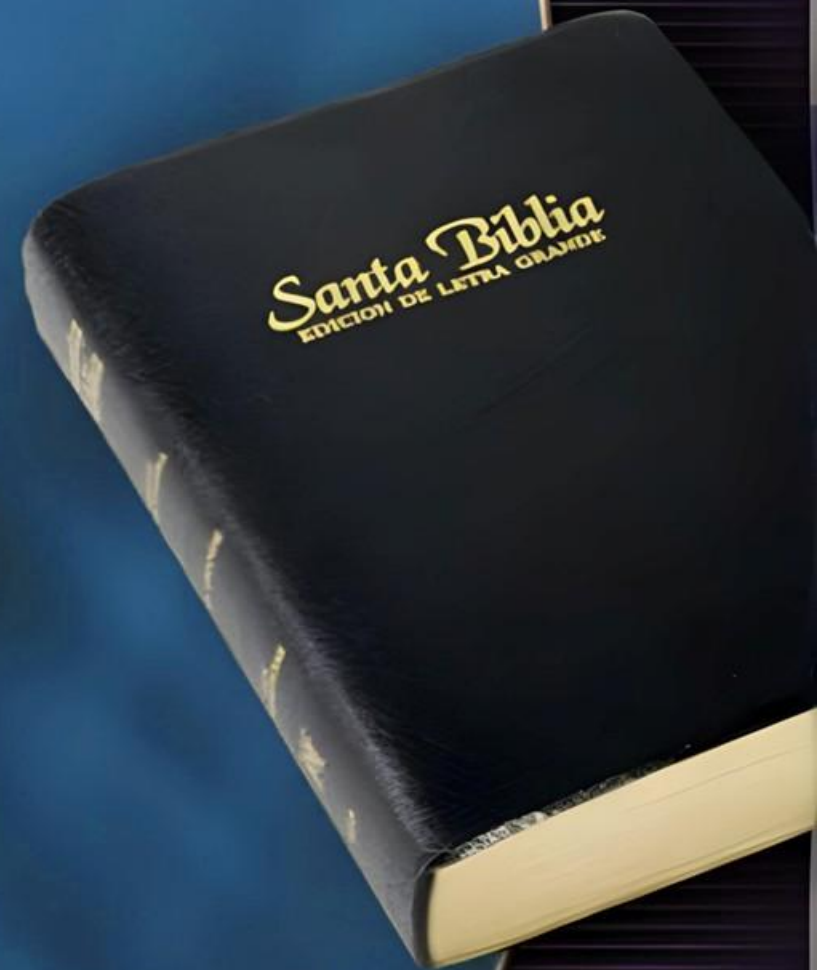
Given that the prophetic text is its own interpreter, it is necessary to search for the meaning of the text primarily from within the text itself.



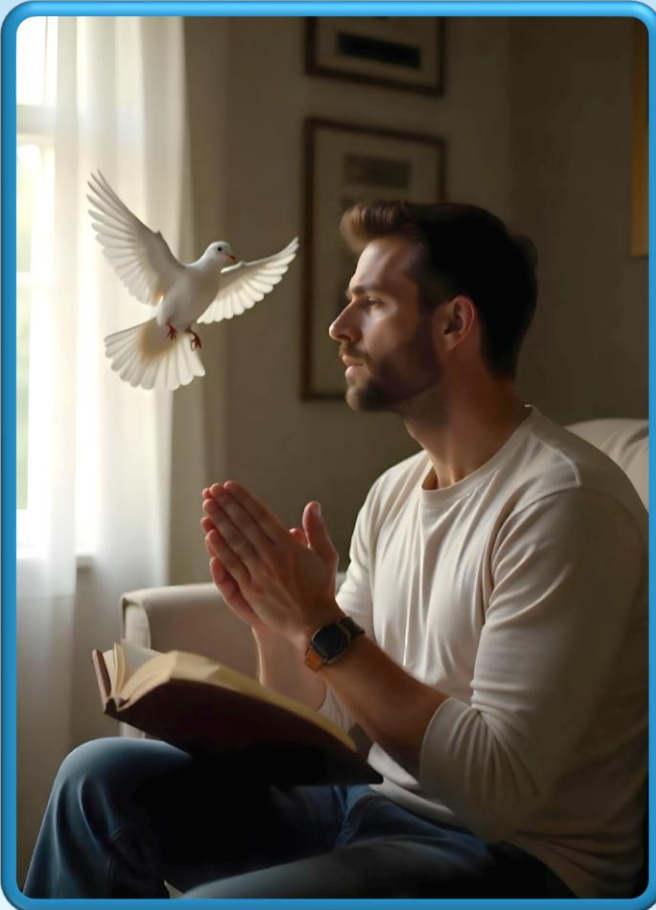
This approach is also rooted in the fundamental principle that was laid down by Ellen G. White in echo of the Reformer Martin Luther: “Scripture interprets Scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”—*Evangelism*, p. 581.

For instance, the association of the ram and the goat, in Daniel 8, in addition to its many linguistic links with Leviticus 16, suggests that the prophecy of Daniel 8 refers to the Day of Atonement.

FOCUSED ON
OUR
RESPONSE
TO THE TEXT



FOCUSING ON ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE: READING SPIRITUALLY



The Holy Scriptures are inspired by God.

It is, therefore, logical that, in order to fully and truly apprehend a particular text, a spiritual factor must be involved.

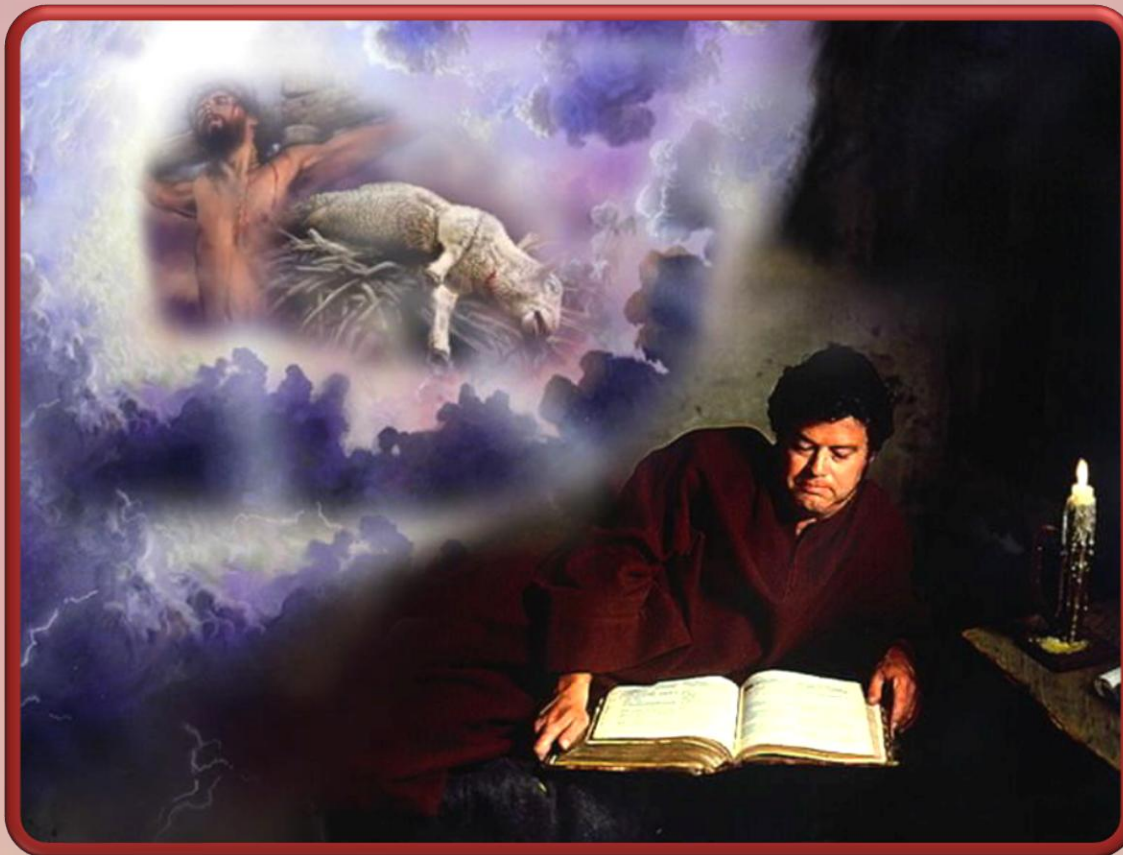
For such things must be “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14, NKJV).

Practically, this idea means that faith and prayer constitute important factors in the success of the exegetical operation.

Prayer will bring God’s assistance to one's study.

Having faith that God inspired the biblical text of prophecy, and believing that prophecy will be fulfilled, will impart to the mind the capacity to see its fulfillment where others will see nothing.

FOCUSING ON ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE: READING INTELLIGENTLY



The task of understanding the inspired text requires diligence and painstaking effort on our part.

Ecclesiastes has called this effort “a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!” (Eccles. 1:13, NIV).

The verb “understand” is a keyword in the book of Daniel (appearing 15 times). For “let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me’ ” (Jer. 9:24, NKJV).

In other words, knowing God is the ultimate goal of wisdom.

FOCUSING ON ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE: READING CORPORATELY



Just as the biblical text of prophecy has come to us through the testimony of the community of God's people, such prophecy is likewise destined for the community of God's people.

Although the study of the Word of God does not exclude the creative contribution of the individual, it involves other brothers and sisters in faith, as well.

When God speaks, He generally addresses His people as a worship community: “ ‘Hear, O Israel’ ” (Deut. 6:4).

Daniel predicts that, at the end of time, “ ‘many’ ” (that is, God's people, the “ ‘wise’ ”) “ ‘shall understand’ ” (Dan. 12:10, NKJV).

FOCUSING ON ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE: READING EXISTENTIALLY



Unless the Scriptures change us and affect our lives, we will not understand them.

To illustrate this point, we would do well to consider a story about a European tourist in Africa who mocked his African servant because he was reading the Bible: “Why do you read the Bible?” The missionary then added, “This is just a bunch of fairy tales.” The African servant responded: “If I had not read the Bible, I would have already eaten you.”

This lesson contains an important principle about the powerful effect of the Word of God, which is compared to “any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12, NKJV).

Thus, the prophetic Word of God is such that it may not only cut sharply through the sins of our enemies and oppressors, but it also may speak or testify “‘against’” us (Jer. 28:8, NKJV).

FOCUSING ON ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE: READING ETHICALLY



Sad to say, Bible prophecies often have been used to support human iniquity.

Racist theories, which promoted the idea of the superiority of the white race over the black race in order to justify apartheid and slavery, were founded on a distorted understanding of the prophecy of Genesis 9:25.

Antisemitism, which led to pogroms and the Crusades and played a significant role in the murder of six million Jews, was based on and nurtured by a misinterpretation of biblical prophecies (Dan. 9:24).

Throughout history, the abuses and crimes perpetrated against women within the private circles of families were often justified by the reference to the prophecy of Genesis 3:16.

As we study God's prophetic Word this quarter, let us permit inspired Scripture to take complete control of our minds and of our hearts, for the purpose of imparting "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Apply these principles to the questions below, focusing on 2 Timothy 3:15–17.

ATTENTION TO THE TEXT

What are the keywords of 2 Timothy 3:15–17?

Discuss and reflect on the importance of the following words: “Scriptures,” “wise,” “given,” “complete.”

Why does the study of Scripture inspire creative thinking?

What is the structure of this text?

What is the context of this passage?

Find two other biblical texts with the same theme (for example, Psalm 119:97–104 and John 5:39). Identify the parallels between these texts and compare and contrast their themes. How are they the same or different?

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Apply these principles to the questions below, focusing on 2 Timothy 3:15–17.

FOCUSING ON YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE

Which words in 2 Timothy 3:15–17 refer to the importance, and necessity, of approaching the study of Scripture with an attitude of reverence? For example, reflect upon, and discuss, the following words: “Holy Scripture” (implies the need for a spiritual approach), “given” (gift from God), “inspiration” (work from the Holy Spirit).

Which words in the text refer to the need to read intelligently? For example, reflect upon and discuss the following words: “know” (cognitive function; information to learn), “wise” (exercise of thinking), “instruction” (ability to receive directions and learn new lessons).

Which words refer to the need for corporate reading? For example, reflect upon and discuss the following words: “from childhood” (involvement of parents), “correction” (involvement of parents and teachers), “good work” (something done on behalf of people in need).

Which words refer to the need for the application of the text in one’s personal life? For example, reflect upon and discuss the following words: “make you wise” (hones one’s sense of discernment and personal judgment). Which words refer to the need for ethical sensitivity? For example, reflect upon and discuss the following words: “in righteousness” (develops the capacity to discern what is right).