

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

How to Interpret Scripture **Lesson 7: Language, Text, and Context**

Several ideas in this week's lesson point to some beautiful themes in the 1888 message. One of them is the Bible word "lovingkindness" in Monday's lesson. Pure down-to-earth happiness, what everybody wants but few find, is the theme of God's lovingkindness. "Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies ..." (Psalm 103). No more words can help your healing if you simply believe that!

"Don't forget all His benefits," is next. Our old hymn tries to say it, "Count your many blessings!" When everything has seemed to go wrong, and even death stares you in the face, can't you "count" as one blessing the truth that the Son of God has died your second death? It can't be wrong to revel in that, even if you're drawing your last mortal breath! There's life and healing in that reveling.

"Who forgives all your iniquities." You can spend all day thinking of that "baraka." (No day is long enough.)

"Who heals all your diseases." Maybe we should recognize that there is a deeper truth therein—"who [continually tries to] heal" them, but is hindered by our continual state of unbelief. "To bless Him" instead of continually wailing, "Bless me, O Lord!" is a health-giving exercise "of my soul." It's a grand paradigm shift in thinking, a new departure in faith that is consistent with the new and deeper truths inherent in the "cleansing of the sanctuary." They pervade living in this grand Day of Atonement. It's a distinctly fresh thought in the popular "relationship" idea: a bride stands in a different "relationship" to the Bridegroom than does the flower girl at the wedding; such feeling for Christ (as He is suffering today) is healing to a soul sick with egocentricity.

"Who redeems your life from destruction." You don't pray your thanks to the angel who saved you from that car crash, but you thank the Lord for sending him.

Another very important 1888 idea mentioned in Thursday's lesson in the book of Genesis is God's promises to Abraham (and therefore to us as well)—"the new covenant." The first step in understanding is to see that when God makes a covenant, it is always a one-sided promise on His part. God's "covenant" with Abraham was His "promise" to him (Gal. 3:17, 18).

Abraham the unbeliever became "the father of us all" when he chose to believe those promises. "It is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed [that is, all of us], not only to those who are of the law [natural

descendants, literal Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ... the father of many nations" (Rom. 4:16-18).

Read those promises in Genesis 12: "[1] I will make you a great nation; [2] I will bless you [3] and make your name great; [4] and you shall be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and I will curse him who curses you; and [7] in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (verses 2 and 3). The promises were renewed again in chapter 15 when God called him out of his tent one night and asked him to count the stars: "So shall your descendants be" (verse 5).

As one reads the entire story through chapters 12-19, the surprising fact emerges that God never asked Abraham to make any promise in return! Abraham did the only right thing he could do when he responded: "He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (15:6). That is all that God has asked us to do: *believe His promise to us*. What Jesus said is true: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Those who worry that salvation by grace through faith alone won't produce enough works need to remember that true faith always "works through love" (Eph. 2:8, 9; Gal. 5:6).

The reason why God's covenant is always a one-sided promise on His part is because He knows that our nature is so weak and sinful that we cannot keep our promises to Him. When we make promises to Him and then inevitably break them later, we get down on ourselves, "I'm no good," "I'm not cut out to go to heaven," etc.

Monday's lesson mentions the word "peace" in the Bible. The first message Jesus gave to the assembled disciples after His resurrection was, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). This is no vain compliment; peace of heart is what you long for and He gives it to you today. "My peace I give to you" (John 14: 27), and that is in the midst of tribulation. The peace comes with your believing the new covenant promises, all seven of them in Genesis 12:2, 3.

You may have to pray the prayer of Mark 9:24: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." A wise writer assures us that we can never perish while we pray that prayer. Every little prayer you pray, making that choice, makes you stronger in the Lord.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfpi_9chlyc

Many of Pastor Penno's sermons are on YouTube in Spanish. Just type **pastor paul penno en español** in the search bar.

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