

Always Take it as it Reads?

One of the most common charges against advocates of the non-violent God message is that we do not take all Scripture “as it reads,” often citing the following quotation by Sister White:

The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers... The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed... If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds... GC 598.3

The above is a crucial counsel, but is it possible that some have gone to the other extreme by adopting a hyper-literalist method of interpretation with no exceptions? If we interpret the Bible this way, we will come across many contradictions when we ask certain questions, such as:

- Who assaulted Job—God (Job 2:3) or Satan (1:12)?
- Who led David to number Israel—God (2 Sam. 24:1) or Satan (1 Chron. 21:1)?
- Who destroyed Jerusalem without mercy—God (Jer. 13:14) or Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 21:7)?
- Who killed Saul—God (1 Chron. 10:13, 14) or Saul (1 Chron. 10:4, 6)?

Taking the strictly literal view of Scripture also leads people to believe God sends delusions (2 Thess. 2:11), deceives (Jer. 4:10; Ezek. 14:9), hides truth (Matt. 11:25), tempts (Matt. 6:13), creates evil and darkness (Is. 45:7; Amos 3:6), etc.

Did Ellen White intend for people to take the Bible as it reads in an ultra-literalist way that puts God in such a light? If this is the case, then we should see Ellen White consistently take Scripture strictly as it reads. However, if she does not always interpret seemingly plain statements this way, is there a common denominator behind her non-literalist interpretations?

God Said to do What He Allows

Who Sent Spies into the Promised Land?

God Requested It	Israel Requested It
Numbers 13:1–2 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.	Deuteronomy 1:22 And ye came near unto me [Moses] every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.
“Here it was proposed by the people that spies be sent up to survey the country. The matter was presented before the Lord by Moses, and permission was granted. ” PP 387.1	

Did God Harden Pharaoh’s Heart?

God Hardened It	Pharaoh Hardened It
Exodus 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses... I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.	Exodus 8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.
“ God never compels a man to offend and be lost. We read that he hardened the heart of Pharaoh... Did God strengthen and confirm the king in his obstinacy?—No, he simply allowed the seeds of unbelief to produce their fruit... God left the king to the inclinations of his own heart. ” RH July 27, 1897, par. 5	

Did God Send Fiery Serpents to Destroy?

God Destroyed Israel with Serpents	The Destroyer Destroyed Israel with Serpents
Numbers 21:5–6 ⁵ And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for <i>there is no bread, neither is there any water;</i> and our soul loatheth <i>this</i> light bread. ⁶ And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.	1 Corinthians 10:9–10 ⁹ Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. ¹⁰ Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (Who is the Destroyer? See Rev. 9:11)
“... the Lord protected them from venomous serpents; but the time came when, because of Israel’s transgression, impenitence, and stubbornness, the Lord removed His restraining power from these reptiles, and many of the people were bitten and died... ” 8T 50.2	

Making Absalom Commit Adultery?

God Caused Absalom to Sleep with David’s Wives
2 Samuel 12:11–12 ¹¹ Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For thou didst <i>it</i> secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.
Thus was fulfilled the word of God to David by the prophet [2 Samuel 12:11, 12 quoted]... Not that God prompted these acts of wickedness, but because of David’s sin He did not exercise His power to prevent them. PP 738.4

The Common Denominator

In the above examples the passages in the left columns imply that God was the One who actively caused these events to occur, while the passages in the right columns say that God was not the instigator of these things. In each instance Ellen White interprets **God as being described in Scripture as doing what He permits**. This principle also answers all of the contradictions found on the first page (see examples of this principle in action in the SDA Commentary: <https://tinyurl.com/459c4yn8>).

In the last example given God gives us a "Thus saith the Lord," that He took David's wives and caused Absalom to go "in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." 2 Sam. 16:22. If God Himself says "I will do this thing before all Israel..." (2 Sam. 12:12), why should we not take it as it reads? **Who will say God will not do what He says He will do?** Well, Ellen White clearly did not take it as it reads, as she said that God did not cause these acts of wickedness, but He simply permitted them to happen. How should we know whether to take a verse as it reads or not?

Something Else is Going On

Imagine if after decades of marriage, you saw your loving spouse suddenly act in shockingly cruel ways toward a disabled person. Would you quickly admit that your wife has a dark side, or would you investigate deeper and at least give them a chance to explain?

When we read verses about God in Scripture that seem contradictory to the life of Christ, we must remember that Jesus said, "**He that hath seen me hath seen the Father**" (Jn. 14:9). Ellen White magnified this thought when she declared that "**All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son.**" 8T 286.1. All Scripture is inspired, but not everything should be taken strictly as it reads, as we have seen that oftentimes God is described as doing what He merely permits. When verses about God don't look like Jesus, we can be confident something else is going on "behind the scenes." Our God is fully revealed in His Son, and He never changes (Mal. 3:16; Heb. 13:8)—the God of the New Testament is the same as the Old.

We're told to take the Bible as it reads, and we should do this a majority of the time. Yet at times, a plain reading results in apparent contradictions:

- Who assaulted Job:
God (Job 2:3) or Satan (1:12)?
- Who hardened Pharaoh's heart:
God (Ex. 4:12) or Pharaoh (Ex. 8:15)?
- Who sent serpents to bite Israel:
God (Num. 21:5-6) or the Destroyer (1 Cor. 10:9-10)?

Could we imagine Jesus doing any of the above? Do we accept the texts at face value which describe God doing these things? Or does Christ provide the lens for understanding God's true character, inviting us to look beyond the surface? Jesus said "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9), and Ellen White agreed when she wrote that "All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son." 8T 286.

How do we resolve the tension between these pictures of God and the life of Christ? This study will empower you to look beyond the surface of passages where God doesn't look like Jesus.



For more information, please read
Plain Statements.
Download the entire book for FREE at:
Maranathamedia.com

