

821 Can We Understand the Bible?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. It comes today in hundreds of languages. It seems strange to me that some think you shouldn't read this Bible but let a church tell you what to believe. Others think the Bible is too hard to understand to be of any good. Still others think it has nothing meaningful to say to anyone today. Today we're asking the question, "Can the Bible Be Understood?" There are a number of popular beliefs being taught about the Bible that we need to explore--perhaps you have heard people say some of them: "The Bible is not meant to be understood." "The Bible says different things to different people." "What is important is not so much what the Bible says but what the Bible says to me." "The New Testament addressed the culture of the first century and really doesn't speak to us." "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere and love Jesus." "You can make the Bible say anything you want it to." One idea that seems to keep floating around is, "Take a passage of Scripture and read it to a group of people. There will be as many interpretations of that passage as there are people in that room." Is this really true?

Is the Bible meant to be understood? We might also ask if the Bible is intended to be understood alike. Well, here are some passages that answer that question. Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:125 says, "I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies." Psalm 119:130 says, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." And Proverbs 6:23 says, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life."

When I hear people say the Bible is not meant to be understood, I wonder who told them that. Did they get it from the Bible or did they get it from people. Now some churches don't want you to read your Bible. Does that sound surprising? But, you see, these churches know that if you begin reading your Bible, you will find that what the Bible teaches is different from what they teach and practice. If you began reading the Bible, you might doubt their authority and leave their church. They want to keep you listening to them and abiding by their rules. They wouldn't want you to study, to learn, and to think for yourself. As long as they can keep you from reading the Bible, they can keep you in their power.

Some churches supply books in addition to the Bible. Perhaps it's a creed book, a rule of faith and practice, or a church manual. They expect you to read their book as a way to understand the Bible. Their book is what defines them and makes people one of them. So you can't just take the Bible for itself. They figure the Bible needs help in explaining and teaching what it has to say. In their thinking you must give your allegiance to their book along with the Bible to be one of them. Of course, these books and creeds and canons and rules are human products and color the way they understand the Bible. They weren't trying to be malicious, but they were just men. But human products are human and fallible. The Bible is a Divine product and infallible. So when you mix something that is Divine with something that is human, you corrupt the Divine with the human.

The apostle Paul warned in Scripture about this kind of problem, and even in his day there were people who were misusing and tampering with God's Word. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:2-4, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to

everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Now, the devil will do anything, anything, to keep people from understanding the truth of God's Word. He would love nothing more than to blind your eyes and mine to the gospel so that we would not see the truth. If he can whisper in your ear that the Bible is too hard a book to understand, he'll lie to you. If he can tamper with the word so that you begin to believe something that is only partially true, he'll do it. He realizes that if it doesn't have something that sounds true, you won't buy into it. If he can give a lie that sounds true, he can lead you astray. And if he can tamper with the word in such a way as to make his lie really appealing, he will. But when people obey the lie rather than listen to God, they are deceived with a counterfeit religion. The devil has supplied plenty of counterfeits in our world today.

Recently there has been lots of excitement about a "new age" religion, which tells people to quit listening to the Bible and start listening to its book. The author claims that several years ago Jesus himself gave her the teaching of her book. Her book perverts the teaching of Jesus, saying such things as "a slain Christ has no meaning"; "there is no sin"; "The Atonement is the final lesson man needs learn, for it teaches him that, never having sinned, he has no need of salvation"; "Do not make the pathetic error of clinging to the old rugged cross"; and "The recognition of God is the recognition of yourself." The devil loves to mess with people's minds, and in order to do that he must get your mind off the Bible and on his deceptive messages.

The fact is that we would not know what the truth is and what error is if it were not for a permanent standard of truth. The Bible is the standard of truth for all time. God's word is settled in heaven and does not change. It is this stability, this solid foundation, that allows all Christians to remain united to God. God was wise to give to mankind His message in written form in the Bible, because by giving us the Bible, we can know the truth which makes us free. Jesus promised in John 8:31-32, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." I believe that promise is true. The difference between Christ's true disciples and other people is that the true disciples remain in the Word of God. The others drift away from the word.

This is why it is so necessary to stay with God's word. Among the Jews of ancient times, parents were constantly to teach their children the Law of God. The Lord God was concerned that a generation might arise that did not know the Bible, so Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 31:10-13)

If the Bible were so hard to understand, God would not have commanded all Israel to go through this every seven years. Truly we can understand the Bible. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we

may do all the words of this law.” The Bible further says in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” God not only wants us to understand it, He also expects us to obey it.

Now the word of God went out to all Israel: the smart, the dumb, the conservatives, the liberals, the educated, the young, and the old. Those who didn't know God's Law were expected to learn it and to obey it. My friend, you are not an exception. God wants everyone to know His will. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:3-4, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” God doesn't communicate in riddles, nor does He hold back some secret message only to the select few. God wants everyone to be able to know the truth, to be saved, and to live in heaven with Him. Jesus, the Bible says in Hebrews 2:9, tasted death for every person. Why then would God give us a Bible with the words of life, but give it in a way that we couldn't understand? Why, that kind of thinking is absurd.

When God inspired Luke to write one of the four gospels, He chose this Greek Gentile to write to a Gentile authority about Jesus Christ. Now Luke did not grow up knowing about God, and Theophilus had only heard bits and pieces, so here is what the inspired Luke wrote in Luke 1:1-4: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

Theophilus apparently wanted to know the truth, and Luke said he could tell him with certainty (exact knowledge) the things concerning Jesus Christ. The Bible was written to impart to us true knowledge, exact knowledge, and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The apostle John who inspired of the Holy Spirit wrote the Gospel of John said in John 20:30-31, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” God gave us this book, the Bible, so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and by believing be saved and have life in His name. I cannot imagine why, if this is the purpose of the Bible, God would write something no one can understand. The fact is: we can understand what we need to know to be saved and go to heaven and live with God forever!

In the book of Acts, chapter 17, verses 2-4 the Bible says, “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ And some

of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” The Scripture is not some weird riddle, but a book that gives life and tells the marvelous story of Jesus Christ.

From this inspired book, we learn the most wonderful story of love and sacrifice. To some it may be meaningless, but to us it is the most meaningful story in the entire world. I am so thankful that God chose men and inspired them to write that story down in the first century to so that we could hear and read it as it really happened. The New Testament gives us eyewitness accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, a story of good news that saves our souls. There simply is no better, no more important, no more meaningful story in the entire world. We can understand it and take advantage of the blessing it brings. The gospel is God's power unto salvation to everyone who believes it (Romans 1:16). Our task is to hear it, believe it, love it, obey it, and share it with others. Thank God for the Bible!

The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:13, “For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end.” Paul wrote no other thing but what the Corinthians could understand, and we too can understand the Bible. In fact, we must understand the word of God and obey it. Why? Because one day we will be judged by the word of God. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:48: “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.” You and I will be judged one day by the words written in this book. We will stand before God and give an account for our lives, and the standard will be these written words. Again the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” You see the difference between going to heaven and not is in whether we understand and obey this Word.

Now think with me. What kind of God says, “I'm going to judge you by the things written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-15 and John 12:48), but gives us a book that is a riddle to us, that people cannot understand? Wouldn't such a God be a monster? But our God isn't like that. He gives us a book we can understand. No our God loves us and wants us to know the truth. Shouldn't we then strive to know it the best we can? Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” God wants us to study the Bible so that we will know the truth and will not be ashamed on the day of judgment because we didn't follow the teaching of the Bible.

I hope you will follow those teachings and come to Christ. To do that you must hear the words of Christ and believe them. You must repent of your sins and confess the name of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now repentance means that you change your heart, that you leave sin and turn to the ways of God. In love, faith and repentance you need to be baptized. Baptism is immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you do, God will bless you with His grace and forgiveness and add you to His church. Won't you do that, my friend? Won't you do it today?

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