

HOW TO SOLVE BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

Puzzling problems and questions of many kinds crop up when you study the Bible — God's Word. You can find the answers if you search for them. This article shows why there are difficulties in understanding the Bible and how you can solve them.

AGNOSTICS and atheists attack the Bible by claiming it cannot be divinely inspired because of its "many contradictions, discrepancies, absurdities and immoralities." You may have been confronted with these claims. Or you may have found what you thought was a contradiction in the Bible.

But you don't need to doubt the authenticity, authority and inspiration of God's Word. You *can* find the truth and answers to these difficulties. You *can* KNOW, and strengthen your faith in God and His Word with a few, simple guidelines.

The Foundation of All Knowledge

The Bible is God's divine *revelation* of the most necessary, basic knowledge of all life. It is the very FOUNDATION of all right knowledge — knowledge which mankind could not otherwise discover.

The Bible is the revelation of God's mind, will and character. And God is far *greater* than man in knowledge, wisdom and spiritual character. And yet God has given the Bible — His revealed and inspired Word — to men who are imperfect in knowledge, character and spiritual understanding.

Therefore, when carnal, narrow-minded, spiritually ignorant, and puny men try to understand the revelation of an *infinite, all-powerful, all-know-*

ing God, there is bound to be difficulty. It's like a young child trying to understand a lecture given by a college professor. He may understand the words of themselves, but he will not grasp all the *meaning* of the ideas expressed.

Expect to Find Difficulties and Have Questions

You may find it difficult to understand certain parts of the Bible. *This is to be expected.* The apostle Peter wrote that in Paul's epistles there were "some things HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, *unto their own destruction*" (II Peter 3:16).

Realize that some parts of the Bible will be hard to understand at first. You will find things in the Bible that will puzzle you. You may even find some *apparent* contradictions that you cannot reconcile. But don't become deceived into thinking the Bible is filled with errors. Squarely face these difficulties and "search the scriptures" (John 5:39) to find the answers.

Many difficulties arise because of man's ignorance of the facts. But anyone who gives up his belief in the divine origin and inspiration of the Bible because of some facts he cannot reconcile, is a shallow thinker indeed. The one who denies that the Bible is of divine origin and authority has more

numerous and weighty difficulties to explain than one who believes the Bible to be the inspired Word of God.

The very fact that you may not be able to solve a difficulty does not prove it cannot be solved. If *you* can see no possible solution, don't jump to the conclusion that a solution is impossible to find. Should a beginner in algebra, after having tried for hours to solve a problem, declare there is no possible solution because he couldn't find one? Of course not! And neither should Bible students think there are unsolvable difficulties in the Bible, simply because they themselves are not able to solve them.

When some people come to a difficult scripture, they decide immediately what the doubtful text *must mean!* Having made up their minds quickly as to the meaning of this particular verse, they must then *change* their minds about other verses and misinterpret them in order to make them fit with the new one! Trying to *put your own ideas* INTO the Bible is the surest way of MISUNDERSTANDING it entirely.

Reserve your judgment about any difficulties in understanding the Bible you come across. Don't reject truth or the Bible itself because you don't understand certain parts at the moment. Those who make a big issue of some minor points they don't understand, often overlook the really important purpose for which the Bible was written.

The more you study the Bible, the

more questions will be answered. As your knowledge increases, more and more difficulties will disappear. God intends that we understand *all* the Bible.

The Reason for Difficulties

Why are there *apparent* contradictions and discrepancies in the Bible? Why has God permitted them to exist? And what good are they? These are questions you may have and they need answering.

The apparent contradictions and discrepancies in the Bible *stimulate the mind*. They prompt men to search the scriptures for the solution. They attract the inquiring mind. Whately says: "The seeming contradictions in scripture are too numerous not to be the result of design; and doubtless *were* designed, not as mere difficulties to try our faith and patience, but as the most suitable mode of instruction that could have been devised, by mutually explaining and modifying or limiting or extending one another's meaning" (*On Difficulties in Writings of St. Paul*, Essay vii., Sec. 4).

Concerning the differences in the spelling, choice, and arrangement of words in the Greek text of the New Testament, Wordsworth says: "*These discrepancies being such as they are found to be, are of inestimable value*. They show that there has been no collusion among our witnesses, and that our manuscript copies of the Gospels, about five hundred in number, and brought to us from all parts of the world, have not been mutilated or interpolated with any sinister design. . . . These discrepancies are, in fact, evidences of the purity and integrity of the sacred text. They show that the scriptures which we now hold in our hands in the nineteenth century, are identical with those received by the church in the first century as written by the Holy Spirit" (*Preface to Greek Four Gospels*, p. xxii.)

Difficulties Are a Stumbling Block

The apparent discrepancies and difficulties in the Bible are also there as a stumbling block to people whom God is *not* calling today. Remember that

God is not revealing His truth to everyone in our day (see the article, "Is This the Only Day of Salvation?"). Most people's eyes have been blinded and the way God has blinded people is by writing the Bible in such a way they couldn't understand it unless they diligently studied it with a humble and open mind and had the help of God's Spirit.

The parables of Christ, for example, were for this purpose of hiding the true meaning of Christ's teaching (Mat. 13:13-15). The Bible was not written in a clear-cut, right-down-the-line manner. In order for it to be preserved for us today, it had to be written in a way so people could interpret it to suit themselves, and so the atheists, agnostics and critics could find fault with it and "*stumble at the word*, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed" (I Peter 2:8). Also see Isaiah 28:9-13.

Make no mistake about it. If the Bible is inspired by God, there can be no errors in it as originally written — because God could not make a mistake. The Bible plainly says, "*The scripture CANNOT BE BROKEN*" (John 10:35). The Bible **CANNOT CONTRADICT ITSELF!** There can be no real discrepancies. "It should never be forgotten that in spite of what critics have said, no error or contradiction of any kind has ever been proved to have existed in the Scriptures as originally given by God" (*Scripture of Truth* by Sidney Collett, p. 81).

The major cause of difficulties in understanding the Bible is *carelessness* in studying the Bible with a prayerful and humble mind. So to eliminate these difficulties, it is necessary to *study the Bible in the right way* and to have the *right attitude* about it.

Attitude Is Key Factor

Those who study the Bible merely to find errors, will never come to understand it properly. Such people do not fully comprehend *and apply* the PURPOSE of God's Word. This *purpose* is given in II Timothy 3:16, "*ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for CORRECTION, for instruction in righteousness.*"

If you recognize the *authority* of the Bible — as being the inspired Word of Almighty God the Creator — and study it with the purpose of showing you where you are **WRONG** and to find the right instruction that will help you grow to spiritual maturity, then the *supposed* contradictions and other Bible difficulties will be no problem to you.

You must have this right attitude of heart and mind. God says: "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a *contrite spirit*, and **TREMBLETH** at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

If you *tremble* at God's Word and respect the *authority* and *power* behind that Word so much that you are *afraid* to reject or disobey it, then you have the *right attitude* and can fully benefit by your study of the Bible. Don't try to correct or improve the Bible. Let it correct, reprove and teach you.

Methods of Bible Study

Many people come across difficulties in the Bible because they don't know how to study it. And you *must study* it to find the truth. The apostle Paul said: "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (II Tim. 2:15).

This study of the Bible should be with *zeal!* It is something to put your whole heart into. Devote your time and mind to it. God says, " *whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave*" (Eccl. 9:10).

Bible study and prayer go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. Bible study, to be effective, must be accompanied with prayer. Pray and ask God for guidance and understanding. *Ask* Him to reveal the true meaning of what is said in His Word and then *expect* that He will. Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit.

Man of himself is totally ignorant of God and cannot even understand His Word without spiritual guidance. Jeremiah said: "I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is *not in man* that walketh **TO DIRECT HIS STEPS**"

(Jer. 10:23). We need guidance through the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is necessary to understand spiritual truth. The *natural* human mind is *incapable* of understanding spiritual revelations. Paul explained this in I Corinthians 2:14, "The *natural* man" — that is, the natural-born, unconverted mind — "receiveth not the things of the *spirit* of God: for they are *foolishness* unto him; neither can he know them, because they are SPIRITUALLY discerned!" They are revealed by *God's Spirit* as the 10th verse goes on to say, "God hath REVEALED them unto us *by His Spirit*." The Holy Spirit *within us* is the key which alone can unlock the doors to scriptural understanding.

But the Holy Spirit is given to only those who OBEY God (Acts 5:32). *The greater your obedience to God, the greater your wisdom and understanding of the Bible will be.*

Lesson 4 of the *Ambassador College Bible Course* outlines the proper procedure for Bible study. Review this lesson again as well as the articles, "How to Understand the Bible" (PLAIN TRUTH, Jan. 1963, p. 31), "How to Study the Bible" (reprint article), and "Twelve Rules for Bible Study" (reprint article).

One Study Method

When studying the Bible, one approach is to *study one book at a time* in order to understand its general contents. Find out who wrote each book. When, where, and for whom did he write? Under what circumstances did he write the book? Does his book contain laws, poetry, history, religious instruction, or prophecy? What are the practical lessons and doctrines taught? What connection has this book with other parts of the Bible? What is the time period when the events were written?

Not only is it important to read a book from beginning to end, it is also important to read a connected set of books consecutively to the end to get the general thought that pervades throughout.

George Mueller of Bristol once said: "There may seem to be apparent contradictions in the Word, but by patiently and calmly going on reading and meditating, these are removed."

The Bible should be studied systematically and thoroughly. Without this systematic study, we may miss some of the gold nuggets hidden in the deepest parts. Nothing that God has had recorded in the Bible can be lightly passed by.

Analyze What You Read

When you read the Bible, hunt for something. Read a chapter over and over again until you understand it. After a chapter has been read, analyze it and write your own table of contents. This will impress on your mind what the chapter is about and will help you retain this knowledge.

Study every single passage with II Timothy 3:16-17 in mind. Ask yourself: What reproof, correction and instruction is here for *me*? Apply the Bible personally — to yourself. Take the plain and simple meaning of the passage as if it were written for yourself. Believe in the Bible as God's revelation to you, and act accordingly.

Approach Bible study this way and there will be no problem solving any difficulties or apparent contradictions that may arise. There is a fair and reasonable solution for every difficulty and discrepancy found in the Bible.

The next installment will give specific solutions to several Bible difficulties and apparent contradictions.