

AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
WITH SOLUTIONS TO BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

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P R E F A C E

Biblical interpretation or "hermeneutics" is nothing more than determining what the Bible means. What is the correct meaning of the Scriptures and who has the authority to determine that meaning? This is Biblical interpretation.

Some believe that the Roman Catholic Church has the authority to interpret Scripture. Nicholas of Lyra wrote (Preface 2 to the Postillae):

I protest that I do not intend to assert or determine anything that has not been manifestly determined by Sacred Scripture or by the authority of the Church. . . . Wherefore I submit all I have said or shall say to the correction of Holy Mother Church and of all learned men. (Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, article "Interpretation," pp. 721-722.)

Wyclif protested against such a view by saying:

Though there were a hundred popes and every monk were made a cardinal, their opinion in matters of faith is to be valued only insofar as it is founded upon Scripture. (Ibid.)

That view is more correct. The Bible interprets itself. Man can only study it to find what it has to say. But the men most capable to do this study are those who are filled with God's Holy Spirit and have been chosen to instruct the people--His true ministers. The ministers of the true Church of God do have the authority to explain and expound the Bible.

Agnostics and atheists attack the Bible by claiming it cannot be divinely inspired because of its "many contradictions, discrepancies, absurdities and immoralities."

Because the modern critic tries to interpret the Bible like any other book, he can't understand it and could find many discrepancies and contradictions in it. But the Bible is not written from the same viewpoint as other books. While it gives facts about the history of man and the development of society, the Bible gives much more. It gives God's view and interpretation of those facts and reveals their real meaning. No other book has such knowledge. And no other book claims to be inspired by God.

We don't need to doubt the authenticity, authority and inspiration of God's Word. We can find the truth and answers to any difficulties. We can know and strengthen our faith in God and His Word with a few, simple guidelines.

This thesis will give principles of Bible study that will help the reader to understand the Bible and find answers to many of his questions. We will show why there are difficulties in understanding the Bible and how they can be solved. In addition, solutions to many Bible difficulties are included as examples. We shall prove there are no real discrepancies and no real contradictions in the inspired Word of God.

CHAPTER I

WHY DIFFICULTIES?

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

A person 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).

The Bible student will encounter difficulties.

Torrey admits this:

Who is there of us who has not found things in the Bible that have puzzled us, yes, that in our early Christian experience have led us to question the Bible was, after all, the Word of God. We find some things in the Bible which it seems impossible for us to reconcile with other things in the Bible. We find some things which seem incompatible with the thought that the whole Bible is of Divine origin and absolutely inerrant. It is not wise to attempt to conceal the fact that these difficulties exist. It is the part of wisdom, as well as of honesty, to frankly face them and consider them. (R.A. Torrey, Difficulties in the Bible, p. 9.)

We don't need to become discouraged when we encounter difficulties. We need to realize that some parts of the Bible will be hard to understand at first. We will find things in the Bible that will puzzle us. We may even find some apparent contradictions that we cannot reconcile. But the Bible is not filled with errors. We need to 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 we may not be able to solve a difficulty does not prove it cannot be solved. If we can see no possible solution, we shouldn'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.

In many cases, the difficulty doesn't really exist. Angus pointed out:

Perplexities and doubts may, in numberless cases, be removed by a better knowledge of the text of Scripture, by the correction of inaccurate translation, by an acquaintance with the manners and customs of the age and country in which a book was written, and by a wider application of historical facts. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, p. 260.)

Many alleged errors have been investigated by competent scholars and the result thus far confirms the accuracy of the Bible. Many difficulties have been cleared away and new proofs for the Bible's authenticity have been discovered.

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 our own ideas INTO the Bible is the surest way of MISUNDERSTANDING it entirely.

We must reserve our judgment about any difficulties in understanding the Bible we come across. Why reject truth or the Bible itself because we 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 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 that need answering.

Thomas Boys has well said:

There is much in the Holy Scriptures which we find hard to understand: nay, much that we seem to understand so fully as to imagine that we have discovered in it some difficulty or inconsistency. Yet the truth is, that passages of this kind are often the very parts of the Bible in which the greatest instruction is to be found: and more than this, the instruction is to be obtained in the contemplation of the very difficulties by which at first we are startled. This is the intention of these apparent inconsistencies. The expressions are used in order that we may mark them, dwell upon them, and draw instruction out of them. Things are put to us in a strange way, because if they were put in a more

ordinary way, we should not notice them. (Commentary, I Peter 3, quoted in Figures of Speech Used in the Bible by E.W. Bullinger, p. xi.)

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 were designed, not as mere difficulties to try our faith and patience, but as furnishing 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 quoted by John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 31.)

Difficulties stimulate interest in Bible study.

Angus remarks:

And if it be said that these difficulties are too numerous, or that the solution of them has been too slow, it may be answered that this gradual solution supplies to each age fresh evidence, and excites continued interest in Scripture, while the fact proves that the evidence of the Bible, like its doctrine, is for all time. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, p. 271, emphasis mine.)

Anstey adds to this by saying:

The solution of difficulties, the clearing up of discrepancies, the reconciliation of apparent contradictions, and the attainment of a clear perception of the perfect harmony which penetrates into the last detail and permeates and pervades the entire structure of Holy Scripture, is a source of unfailing intellectual interest. (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, p. 20.)

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 Ghost. (Preface to Greek Four Gospels, p. xxii, quoted by John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 37.)

Difficulties in the text are important from this point of view: They show that the scribes must have been faithful with the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts because the tendency would always be to "correct" the apparent discrepancies. This was not done.

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 (Mat. 13:10-15 and I Pet. 2:8). We need to remember that God is not revealing His truth to everyone in our day (see Mr. Armstrong's 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 major cause of difficulties in understanding the Bible is carelessness in studying the Bible without 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."

We should study every single passage with this verse in mind. We need to ask ourselves: What reproof, correction and instruction is here for me? The Bible should be applied personally--to take the plain and simple meaning of the passage as if it were written directly to us and then act accordingly.

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

Even theologians of this world understand this point. Anstey says:

The primary requisite of the Bible student is a sincere desire to know the will of God in order that he may do it. The Bible is a revelation of the will of God. Its primary appeal is to the will of man. It was written to be obeyed. Hence the primary qualification demanded in the reader is not scholarship but surrender, not expert knowledge, but willingness to be led by the Spirit of God. (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, p. 11, emphasis mine.)

When a certain lawyer asked Christ what to do to inherit eternal life, Christ asked him: "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26). When a person reads the Bible, does he read it in order to confirm his prejudices or form his opinions? Does he read it in order to confute his opponents or to find out what and whom he ought to oppose? Does he read it through the eye-glasses of tradition--everything colored by what the early church fathers taught? Or does he read the Bible with verse in mind. We need confidence that there is more light and truth to be revealed by God's Word?

We need help in understanding the Bible. When Philip heard the Ethiopian eunuch reading the book of Isaiah, he asked him: "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied: "How can I unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30-31).

The Bible student needs instruction and guidance. But the only man who is at all competent to explain the

will and Word of God is the man whose will is fully surrendered to God. There are great Greek and Hebrew scholars who are blind as a bat to the real meaning of the Scriptures because they lack that clearness of spiritual vision that comes only from a surrendered will.

Both the Bible student and teacher must have the 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 we tremble at God's Word and respect the authority and power behind that Word so much that we are afraid to reject or disobey it, then we have the right attitude and can fully benefit by our study of the Bible. Instead of trying to correct or improve the Bible we must let it correct, reprove and teach us.

CHAPTER II

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

Many people come across difficulties in the Bible because they don't know how to study it. The apostle Paul said: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not 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 our whole heart into. We need to devote our 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, to be effective, must be methodical and systematic. If there is no system, there will be no real study. Some of the common errors in Bible study need to be pointed out. The methods that lead to true understanding of the Bible need to be explained.

People use different methods in studying the Bible. Some use the gamble and ramble method. They read wherever the Bible opens. Thus they gamble and ramble through the Bible. But George Mueller found that when he used this method, the Bible began to continually open to the same place. Obviously this is not a good method.

Others study the Bible one book at a time. This method can be effective and could be used to find the general contents of a particular book. When using this method, we should find out who wrote each book. When, where, and for whom did the author write? Under what circumstances did he write? And for what purpose? Every book has an object as well as a subject. 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.

Some people study the Bible chronologically-- according to time sequence. If we study from Genesis to Revelation, the material will be in basic chronological order, but certain books or chapters will not be in time sequence. This method of study would be helpful when reading the prophetic books. The time when each prophet wrote should be known as some of the prophets were contemporary.

Another method is to study the Bible biographically. That is, to study the lives of leading characters in

the Bible. This method would be especially helpful when we notice the weakness and strong points of a person God was able to use. Notice why some men failed to succeed while others triumphed and received many blessings.

One other method is to study the Bible by subject. This method is a very good one and is used by the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course. To find what the entire Bible says about one subject involves a thorough type of study which would help solve some difficulties.

Three Basic Elements

But regardless of what method of study a person uses, it must include three basic elements to be an effective one. The first element is reading. The apostle Paul told Timothy: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (I Tim. 4:13).

Some make the mistake of only reading books and literature about the Bible, but don't read the Bible itself. The Bible should be read--from cover to cover. "All scripture is inspired. . ." (II Tim. 3:16). Every verse is important.

But some read only the New Testament. Others read only the Gospels. Some never read the prophecies. While others read only Daniel and Revelation. Such reading is

not systematic. It's not complete or balanced.

It is necessary to have a planned reading program that will enable you to read the entire Bible in a year's time. Since there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible, by reading three chapters a day and two additional chapters on the Sabbath, the entire Bible can be read in a year. For balance, it is best to read two chapters in the Old Testament and one chapter in the New.

Although the King James Version should be used as the basic study Bible, this daily reading can be done in a modern translation such as the Jewish Version, Moffatt, Revised Standard Version, or the Amplified Version. In any case, the Bible used for reading should be unmarked to keep the message fresh. When reading a marked Bible, thoughts tend to run in a groove suggested by the marks and notes.

Study Thoughtfully

The second basic element needed in effective Bible study is thorough study. This is more than just reading it. It is the kind the Bereans did. When Paul preached to them, "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and SEARCHED the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

This study requires searching. "Yea, if thou

criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5).

The Bible student must seek and search for knowledge of God. He must investigate, examine, scrutinize and sift the scriptures to find the answers and solutions to difficulties. He must hunt for something.

As he studies through the Bible, the student should take notes. This helps to put thoughts in order and is an aid to remembering what is studied. Notes can be put in the margin of the Bible. In the study of some books, making an outline or table of contents of each chapter will be a great help. This will impress on our mind what the chapter is about and will help us retain this knowledge.

Marking the Bible as we study is important. A person who is marking his Bible is obviously studying intently. Five styles of markings which can be used are: (1) coloring, (2) underlining, (3) circling, (4) brackets, or (5) signs in the margin. One recommended method is to underline for flow, bracket for doctrine and use symbols in the margin for personal correction. Coloring can be used to emphasize important, KEY verses. But multi-color systems should be avoided as they clutter up the pages.

Words or phrases appearing in the text can be explained by making notes in the margin. For example, "conversation" in Philippians 3:20 should read "citizenship." We can put a bracket around "conversation" and make a note in the margin. References to better translations can also be noted in the margin.

Compare Scripture with Scripture

Another note to make in the margins is any reference to related scriptures or parallel passages-- texts which relate to the same subject, teach the same doctrine or relate to the same historical fact. A thorough study of the Bible will be the kind that will include the comparison of scriptures. The importance of this point is stated by Anstey:

One of the main reasons for the decay of interest in the study of the Bible. . . is the old method of reading the Bible in titbits and snippets instead of devoting the necessary time to grasp the scope and sweep of its majestic argument, and reading the Text in the light of the context, the context in the light of its relation to the book in which it is found, and the book in relation to the Bible as a whole. (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, pp. 51, 52.)

God wrote the Bible with gaps between related material in order to hide the meaning. God said, "For precept must be upon precept. . . line upon line. . . here a little and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will I speak to this people"

(Isa. 28:10-11). The dictionary defines "stammering" as the making of pauses in speaking. God has written the Bible with gaps or pauses between related material-- material which must be brought together before its meaning becomes clear. (I Corinthians 2:13.)

Related material naturally has the same subject and often many of the same words will be used in each of these passages. By using a concordance, we can bring related material together and find the true meaning of what the Bible has to say about anything.

Angus gives this rule:

In comparing Scripture with Scripture, therefore, ascertain, FIRST, the sense which the words to be examined bear in other parts of the same writer; then, in other writings of the same period; then, throughout the Bible. The meaning of words often changes; and all writers do not use the same word in the same sense. . . . Sometimes we have to compare the facts or doctrines of Scripture in order to gain a complete view of Scripture truth. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, p. 197.)

The Bible should be studied systematically, thoroughly and thoughtfully. 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.

Prayer and Meditation

The third basic element needed in effective Bible study is prayer and meditation. Bible study and prayer

go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. Bible study, to be effective, must be accompanied with prayer. We need to pray and ask God for guidance and understanding, to ask Him to reveal the true meaning of what is said in His Word expecting He will, and to 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 Holy Spirit. It is God's Spirit that will guide us into all Truth (John 16:13).

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. The

more we pray, the more of God's Spirit we will have to guide us into greater understanding.

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

Along with prayer, must be meditation. God told Joshua: This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night" (Joshua 1:8).

To meditate means to think, ponder and digest. It means letting the Bible saturate your thoughts. The Bible student should think about the Bible whenever he has a free moment--day and night. He can memorize key scriptures to help him think about them.

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 second chapter of Proverbs gives four vital steps that lead to true knowledge and understanding.

They are, beginning with verse 1:

1. Accept God's Word as the truth. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee. . . ."
2. Act on what the Bible says. "So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding. . . ."

3. Pray for understanding. "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding. . . ."
4. Study diligently. "If thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path" (Proverbs 2:1-5, 9).

Bible study shouldn't be a drudgery. It should be something we love to do. It should be enjoyable, exhilarating and satisfying. 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 alleged discrepancy found in the Bible.

Bible Study Helps

The person who studies the Bible is a workman. Remember what Paul told Timothy? "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a WORKMAN that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

Bible study involves diligent, concentrated work! And to do this work, we need the appropriate tools. The primary tool needed, of course, is a good Bible. The King James Version should be used as a basic study Bible. Other modern English translations can be referred to when the old King James English obscures the meaning. The new

Amplified Version is especially helpful.

A good concordance is another tool we need for Bible study. The Cruden's Concordance is adequate for most people. Those who want an even better concordance can obtain either Strong's Exhaustive Concordance or Young's Analytical Concordance.

A concordance is important to have because by knowing a few words of a passage we wish to find in the Bible, it will find that passage for us. It also helps in other ways. By using a concordance, which has the words of the Bible arranged alphabetically and tells where they may be found, we can bring related material together and obtain the whole true meaning of what the Bible has to say about anything.

A good analytical concordance will also help in discovering the true meaning of the original text. Where it is impossible to become an expert in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew, a good concordance will at least give the transliterations of the original words in Roman script and show where they are found in the Bible.

Commentaries may be a helpful tool to advanced students of the Bible. They may paraphrase a difficult passage or give comments that may shed light on the meaning. But we need to be cautious about using commentaries as they often give their own ideas and many times

the writers are prejudiced by their own religious beliefs --often which are contrary to what the Bible teaches. Commentaries are sometimes good in relating physical facts, but are often erroneous when it comes to explaining doctrine.

Then again, most commentaries are written in a technical language and in such obsolete English that many people would find them difficult to understand. Reading such commentaries would be a waste of time for most people. The commentary published by the Seventh Day Adventists, however, is written in clear, modern English and is helpful on subjects not affected by doctrinal bias.

Another helpful tool is Halley's Pocket Bible Handbook. This is an abbreviated Bible commentary that briefly gives the background to the Bible, including important archaeological discoveries proving the Bible. The sections on Genesis, Daniel and Assyria are especially good.

Other External Helps

The Bible student needs to know the history, geography and customs of Bible times.

Thoroughly to understand the Scriptures, to harmonize apparent contradictions, to gather up all the truth it contains, and sometimes even to enable us to select, out of several meanings, the one which is most consistent with the Divine plan, it is often necessary to seek some external or collateral help.

We need to know the facts of general history, of chronology, of natural history, of geography, with the opinions and ideas prevalent among the people to whom the various parts of Scripture were addressed, and especially the manners and customs of Eastern nations. The illustrations derived from these several sources often throw a flood of light upon the sacred text. . . . A knowledge of geography will often explain and reconcile the statements of the Bible, show the beauty and truthfulness of particular passages, confirm the authenticity of the narrative by the accuracy of the local colouring, and bring out the sense which might otherwise remain concealed. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, pp. 276, 296.)

The Bible student should be well acquainted with history, civil and political, especially of the Israelites, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Romans and Greeks. If the student has no time for extensive investigations, he should at least make himself master of Josephus.

A good Bible atlas will give geographical knowledge of the area around Palestine. Such a book specializes in Bible maps and has other helpful information about geography and history.

A Bible dictionary is another helpful tool. Such a book describes people, places and things mentioned in the Bible. It also has chronological tables and maps concerning Bible times. There are several types of Bible dictionaries and Peloubet's Bible Dictionary is one that is good.

The importance of knowing the customs and manners or archaeology pertaining to the Bible is pointed out by

McClelland:

No man is fit to expound a paragraph in any book whatever, unless he can bring distinctly before his mind all the usages and historical facts, all the circumstances of time and place, which relate to the subject treated. (Alex McClelland, Canon and Interpretation of the Holy Scripture, p. 136.)

Another helpful book that will be useful in solving many difficulties is, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible by Haley. Over 900 solutions are given for so-called contradictions and discrepancies.

These Bible helps can help answer certain Bible questions and solve difficult problems. An example of how knowledge of certain facts can erase difficulties is concerning Belshazzar in the book of Daniel.

Critics once said such a person was unknown to history--that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. Furthermore, he was absent from the city when it was captured. This strong argument seemed unanswerable until Sir H. Rawlinson discovered clay cylinders in Chaldea on which Belshazzar is named by Nabonidus as being his eldest son. This son was the second ruler of Babylon who reigned in his father's absence. This explains why Belshazzar wanted to make Daniel the "third ruler" in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16). See Halley's Pocket Bible Handbook, p. 308.

What is said in these books may not be all true and we may not agree with all they say. The good they contain, however, overbalances their errors. Reading

books about the Bible written by men who were not inspired by God's Holy Spirit must always be done with caution.

CHAPTER III

THE CAUSES OF MANY DIFFICULTIES

Why do people misunderstand the Bible? We cannot deny the fact that some passages in the Bible seem to contradict others. But the difficulty may be traced to one of two causes:

- 1) Either the passages in question have not been studied with the individual and personal care and prayer which this Book demands. This carelessness lies at the root of nearly all the supposed difficulties that we hear about.
Or, --
- 2) As it does happen in a few cases a mistake has been made by an early copyist in writing out the ancient documents now in our possession. (Sidney Collett, Scripture of Truth, pp. 115, 116, emphasis mine.)

Carelessness in reading the Bible and ignorance of what it says is a major cause of difficulties and seeming contradictions. Here is what Sims says about this:

Since so much knowledge is proved to be necessary to a right understanding of the Bible, we may easily believe that difficulties, or seeming contradictions, which occur to us in reading it, most probably arise from our ignorance or inattention. (A. Sims, Helps to Bible Study, p. 100, emphasis mine.)

Personal prejudice and bias is another cause of difficulties. As Tuck says:

The difficulties may be in part, due to the incompleteness of the record, which so seldom tells us all we want to know; but they are chiefly due to the insufficiency, or the incorrectness, of our knowledge, and to the blinding influence of our prejudices.

These, so often, first put things into the Word for us, and then persuade us that the difficulties we find belong to the Word itself. (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties, p. 2, emphasis mine.)

The apostle Paul said some people corrupt the Word of God and handle it deceitfully (II Cor. 2:17 and 4:1-4). Ministers and theologians do this to this day.

The Kinds of Bible Difficulties

All the difficulties in the Bible--the "glaring inconsistencies," the seeming "self-contradictions," and the "manifest discrepancies"--can be found to be one of several major groups.

The first group of difficulties to consider are those due to present-day ignorance of conditions and circumstances under which the Biblical books were written. According to Anstey:

One of the chief sources of the supposed contradictions of Scripture is the practice of ignoring the relation of the various books to each other, to the testament to which they belong, and to the Bible as a whole. (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, pp. 22, 23.)

Because of ignorance, people misunderstand the time when the events were recorded and the commands given. Whenever there is a time gap between one passage and another, there may have been a change in the circumstances. This difference will explain some apparent discrepancies and remove any hint of a contradiction.

In this group we can include those "moral difficulties" having to do with the conduct of people in Old Testament times--the difficulty of understanding why God commanded Israel to exterminate the Canaanites when Christ said we are to love our enemies--of understanding why polygamy and other things were practised by men of the Old Testament.

People of the Old Testament didn't have a complete understanding of God's ways--not having the fulness of the Holy Spirit to guide them as those living after the coming of Christ. It was those "times of ignorance" that God "winked at" or overlooked (Acts 17:30). We cannot judge the conduct of people living in Old Testament times by the standard given by Christ and His apostles.

Who is Speaking?

Some difficulties are caused by carelessly assuming who is doing the speaking. Words are even attributed to God when Satan is actually the speaker. When we say that the Bible is the Word of God--inspired by God with His authority--we don't mean that God is the speaker in every single quotation the Bible contains.

The Bible often records what others say--good men, bad men, inspired men, angels, holy or fallen and Satan himself.

The record of what they said is absolutely true, but the words they said may or may not be true. Genesis 2:16 says: "Thou shalt surely die" and Genesis 3:4 says, "Ye shall not surely die." Is there a contradiction? No! The first verse gives the words of God--the latter, the words of Satan. It is true that the Devil said these words recorded in Genesis 3:4, but he told a lie--a lie believed today by those who say man has an immortal soul.

Careless readers of the Bible don't notice who is doing the talking. They will tear a verse right out of context regardless of the speaker. Many difficulties in understanding the Bible arise from not noticing who is speaking. Always notice who is speaking and what is said. The Bible will sometimes record what a man said to God which may or may not be true.

In studying the Bible, if God is the speaker, we can believe what He says. If an inspired man is the speaker, believe what he says. If an uninspired man is the speaker, judge it according to the law and the testimony of what God has said and revealed (Isa. 8:20). What is said is perhaps true, perhaps false.

If the Devil is speaking, we need to remember that he was a liar from the beginning, but even he could tell the truth at times, or he will mix truth with error.

We should ask ourselves: "whose are these sayings? Are they recorded as being inspired, or inserted as a mere

matter of history? Does the writer endorse the statements as being true, or merely record them? The answer to these simple questions will often be the only solution a problem needs.

Differences Between Bible Writers

Even between the inspired writers of the Bible there may appear to be disagreements or contradictions. One reason is because a basic idea can be said in different ways. When Christ was tempted by Satan, He quoted from the Old Testament and said: "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4 and compare with Mat. 4:4). But the original quotation in Deuteronomy 8:3 says: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Both scriptures convey the same basic idea though phrased differently.

Inspiration doesn't prevent a writer from using his own personal method of expression. Haley says:

Inspiration does not destroy the individuality of the writers. It deals primarily with ideas, rather than words. It suggests ideas to the mind of the writer, allowing him, generally, to clothe them in his own language. In this way his individuality is preserved, and his mental peculiarities and habits of thought make themselves felt in his writings. On this principle we account for the marked difference of style among the sacred writers, as well as for their occasional divergences in setting forth the same idea or in relating the same circumstance. (John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, pp. 6, 7.)

We can compare Isaiah 61:1,2 with Luke 4:18,19 and see how Christ quoted from the Old Testament. He didn't follow it word for word. Also notice how Matthew condenses Isaiah 9:1,2 in Matthew 4:14-16.

An inspired Bible writer was not required to follow the same routine of words. When New Testament writers quoted from the Old Testament, they didn't think it wrong to modify those quotations. They grasped the sense and basic thought of the Old Testament writer and then molded that thought into the form that would best serve the people to whom they were writing. This principle accounts for the apparent discrepancies between the phraseology of the Old Testament and the citations in the New.

Writers Differ in Approach

We need to consider also the point of view and objective of each writer. Two Bible writers may approach the same subject from two different angles. Both accounts must be studied to see the whole truth.

Writers also have used different methods of arrangement. One writer may follow a strict chronological order. Another groups associated ideas together. While one will write history in detail as the events took place, another will omit some events, condense others, or expand them. One writer may give us an orderly, well-constructed biography, but another may give us merely a series of

stories grouped together to illustrate some specific point.

In recording the same event, different writers may record different circumstances, some giving more facts and some fewer. A more complete account will include the facts given in the shorter one and the shorter account will not contradict the more complete one.

This solution is especially useful when studying the four Gospels. The differences in the four Gospels are due to the fact that the writers did not depend on one thing nor draw their accounts from one source. Each one gives only an incomplete history, introducing those details with which each writer was familiar.

If we knew all the circumstances of the case, those which we now know would seem to fit perfectly into their appropriate places in the account. Not one of the Gospel writers gives, nor intended to give, ALL the details. Each selects those particular facts which seem to him to be the most important and passes by incidental points.

Each writer records only what referred to his own particular purpose or experience. Thus, many of the minor connecting facts have not been preserved and recorded. Therefore, we must fill in the missing facts ourselves by resorting to deduction and possible explanations.

Here is what Collett says about this point:

Let those who imagine they have discovered errors and contradictions in the evangelists' writings remember how easy--indeed, how natural--it is to give three or four accounts of one circumstance from different points of view, each account being quite different from the others, and yet all absolutely correct. (Sidney Collett, Scripture of Truth, p. 140, emphasis mine.)

The Gospel of Matthew doesn't follow any chronological series of events or instructions, but groups together associated ideas that portray by living pictures what Christ was like in various circumstances. Mark and Luke are generally chronological.

Each writer followed his own method of arrangement and told his account in his own way. Because the personalities of writers differ in the way they express themselves doesn't mean they disagree with each other.

How Was Time Reckoned?

Writers may also differ in reckoning time. The nation of Israel used both a civil and sacred calendar. The sacred year began in the spring with the month Nisan or Abib. The civil calendar was reckoned as beginning in the autumn with the month Tishri.

If two writers disagree on the month and day of an event, we must see whether or not they use the same calendar for reckoning. If one bases his date on the sacred calendar for his computation, both would actually be correct once we understand the difference in reckoning.

Some say John 19:14 contradicts Matthew 27:45. John describes events before the crucifixion which he says took place at the "sixth hour." Matthew says darkness covered the land after the crucifixion from the sixth to the ninth hours. Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44 say the same.

Obviously, John is using the Roman reckoning of time--counting from midnight. The Jewish State was then under Roman control. To John, the "sixth hour" was 6 o'clock in the morning. According to the Jews' reckoning of time, this was the first hour of the day.

When Bible writers seem to disagree as to numbers and dates, there is no discrepancy unless it can be proven that they intended to reckon from the same point and by the same method.

Considering the opinions the writer opposed when reading what he wrote, is another important point. The epistle of I John takes on an entirely new meaning when we understand that John was writing in opposition to the false teaching of Simon Magus that was creeping into the Church.

The apostle Paul continually attacked vegetarianism in his letters. He writes about this problem in Romans 14 and again in I Timothy 4:1-4 where he also opposes celibacy. In Philippians 3:1-9, Paul fights the idea that physical circumcision makes a man righteous.

In Colossians 2:16, Paul is not referring to the law of Moses or to rituals. Colosse was an area of asceticism and God's people were being criticized for fellowshiping, eating and drinking on the Holy Days.

What Did the Writer Mean?

Words of each writer in the Bible should be understood in the light of how they are normally used by that writer. What is the meaning the writer meant to convey? Matthew, for example, uses the term, "kingdom of heaven" whereas the other gospel writers consistently say "kingdom of God" (compare Mat. 3:2 with Mark 1:15). Matthew certainly didn't mean that the kingdom was in heaven. The word "of" denotes ownership, not locality. It is the kingdom belonging to God who rules from His throne in heaven. This is what Matthew meant to convey.

The apostle John often uses the term "little children" in his first epistle (I John 2:1; 3:7, 4:4). Obviously he's not writing to actual children. He's writing to the "children of God" (I John 3:10)--those who have been spiritually begotten.

When we know the character, age, religious background, nationality and other peculiarities of the writer, we can find the solutions to many difficulties.

CHAPTER IV

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE

To some people, the language in which the Bible was written will make it difficult for some parts to be clearly understood. Lightfoot says: "The greatest difficulties of the Scripture lie in the language; unlock the language and phrases and the difficulty is gone."

Since the Bible is a book for all ages and for all kinds of people, it was written in the kind of language and terminology that could be understood by the common people of all ages.

As Torrey says:

The most plain and obvious meaning of any passage in the Bible is always to be preferred to a subtle and ingenious one; for the Bible was written for plain, honest-minded, humble minded, common folk and not for a few sublimated mystics (R.A. Torrey, The Importance and Value of Proper Bible Study, p. 70).

The Bible is not a scientific textbook. As Tuck explains:

The object of the Bible is not to teach science, but moral and spiritual truth. Scientific facts and truths may be discovered by the intellect and industry of man, and hence no revelation of them is needed. But our origin and destiny, our relations to God, the way of peace and purity, the link between here and the hereafter--the highest wisdom of man has only guessed at these things, and here comes the need that God shall speak (Robert Tuck, Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties, p. 233).

Though the Bible does give the basic foundation for understanding science, it is written in language for the average man--not in some technical and scientific terminology that could be only understood by scientists and experts in fields of technology. "Each book was strictly adapted to the apprehension, and the capacity, of those who first received it" (Ibid., p. 234).

When the "sun stood still" during the time of Joshua's long day, the Bible is not speaking in the language of scientists. Technically the earth may have stopped rotating. But to the observer on earth the "sun stood still."

Tuck makes this conclusion:

Beyond the legendary chapters of Genesis, which demand a separate and distinct treatment, there is no scientific statement in the whole Word of God that is gravely disputable, or beyond reasonable, easy, and common-sense explanation. When we have ceased, in familiar speech, to talk of the "sun rising and the sun setting," we may begin to complain of the Bible writers expressing themselves in the line of their natural observation rather than in the line of scientific precision (Ibid., p. 235).

Is the Language Figurative?

Much of the Bible is written in the form of poetry or in language that is descriptive or figurative. The description of a thunderstorm in Psalm 18 is a good example. In Psalm 42:9, David describes God as a rock and Psalm 91:4 speaks of His wings and feathers.

These descriptions are not to be understood literally. The spiritual attributes of God are compared to physical objects so that we, as human beings, can more adequately comprehend spiritual beings.

There would be no end of such "absurdities" if you were to interpret such passages in a literalistic and matter-of-fact way. We can know when a scripture is speaking in a figurative language if we are honest and use common sense when studying it.

Angus gives this rule about figurative language:

To ascertain, therefore, the meaning of any passage of Scripture, whether the words be employed figuratively or literally, we must ask the following questions: What is the meaning of the terms? If they have but one meaning, that is the sense. If they have several, we then ask, Which of those meanings is required by other parts of the sentence? If two or more meanings remain, then, What is the meaning required by the context, so as to make a consistent sense of the whole? If, still, more than one meaning remains, What then is required by the general scope? And, if this question fails to elicit a clear reply, What then is required by other passages of Scripture? (Joseph Angus, The Bible Handbook, p. 200.)

What did the writer intend to convey? We must not read a meaning of our own into that of the writer. "We must interpret literally everything which was meant to be interpreted literally, and we must interpret figuratively everything that was meant to be interpreted figuratively" (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, p. 14).

When Christ said to a certain man, "Let the dead

bury their dead" (Luke 9:60), He could not have been speaking literally. He was talking about people who are spiritually dead--those without spiritual life--the unconverted (see I Tim. 5:6). Christ was calling this man to be his disciple in preaching the kingdom of God. This was a far more important calling than looking after elderly people until they die. Others who have no spiritual understanding can take care of such physical matters as burying the elderly when they die.

An Important Rule

Another rule to remember is: Any passage in the Bible should be understood as those who were addressed would have understood it. Words that were addressed to any people were generally intended to be understood by them.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (I Cor. 16:2). Did he mean they were to collect an offering at their Sunday morning church service? The booklet, Which Day is the Sabbath of the New Testament? by Mr. Armstrong explains this was not the case at all. The Corinthians knew and understood that Paul was referring to a collection of food and clothing for the poor church members at Jerusalem.

The Corinthians also knew that Paul was referring to meat offered to idols when he said, "Whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no questions for conscience sake" (I Cor. 10:27). The idea of eating unclean meat such as pork and rabbit didn't enter their minds. Yet, these scriptures are misunderstood today because people don't read Paul's letters from the point of view of those who received them.

Paul's letter to Philemon cannot be really understood at all unless you know the background and what was on Paul's mind. Onesimus was once Philemon's slave who ran away and then became converted through Paul's preaching. Paul tactfully requests Philemon to take Onesimus back--not as a bondsman, but as a brother in Christ. Paul really wanted Philemon to willingly release Onesimus of his duties so Paul could use him in carrying out the gospel (verses 13-14). The tact and diplomacy Paul used is remarkable to see once you read the letter in this light.

Another problem: some say the "fruit of the vine" in Matthew 26:29 means grape juice--that the word wine itself is not used in the Gospels in connection with the New Testament Passover. But, according to the Encyclopedia Biblica (article, "Wine"), "fruit of the vine" was an expression used by the Jews at that time in a benediction over the wine cup.

Figures of Speech

Everyone uses figures of speech, even though unknowingly. A figure is a word used out of its ordinary sense or put out of its usual order in a sentence. Or it could be a sentence constructed in a peculiar form such as by expressing something in an unusual manner. It is a deviation from a natural and simple way of expression.

A figure may not be true to fact, but it is true to feeling. These figures of speech are often used in the English language. We may say, "the ground is thirsty" or "the crops suffer." These are not so true to fact, but truer to reality and to feeling.

When we say "the kettle boils" we do not mean the kettle literally, but that the water in the kettle boils. Similar figures of speech were used in the Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible.

How can we recognize a figure of speech? Bullinger says:

Whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood literally, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to known fact, or revealed truth; or seems to be at variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures, then we may reasonably expect that some figure is employed. And as it is employed only to call our attention to some specially designed emphasis, we are at once bound to diligently examine the figure for the purpose of discovering and learning the truth that is thus emphasized. (E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, p. xv.)

In his work of over 1,000 pages, Bullinger has classified 217 figures. There are figures that affect words and others that affect thoughts. There are figures involving omission, change, repetition and addition. The Greeks gave them such names as Ellipsis, Metonymy, Synecdoche, Asyndeton, Hypocatastasis and Metaphor.

Examples of an ellipsis or omission are found in Matthew 5:20 and II Thessalonians 2:9. The ellipsis in these cases has been supplied by the translators and is given in italics in the King James Version. An example where the ellipsis is not supplied is in I Corinthians 7:19 which should be correctly rendered as: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but [on the contrary] the keeping of the commandments of God [is something]."

Bible writers will also use figures of speech involving change. Certain things may be said to be done by one man in one place whereas in another place it may be said to be done by another person who acted on his behalf (see Mat. 8:5-6 compared with Luke 7:2-3 and Mark 10:35 compared with Mat. 20:20). Sometimes the plural is used when the remark is actually to be applied to one person only (see Mat. 26:8 and John 12:4; Mat. 27:44 and Luke 23:39-42). In these cases there is actually no contradiction.

Figures of speech involving repetition and addition will usually present no difficulty. They are used for emphasis.

Hebrew Idioms

The King James Version of the Old Testament often uses the idioms and expressions of the original Hebrew. These are to be understood, therefore, not according to the English, but according to the Hebrew idiom.

When expressing comparison, for example, love and hate were used as an expression for preferring one thing to another. Genesis 29:31 says Jacob "hated" Leah, but the previous verse shows that it was only a matter of Rachel being loved more than Leah--a matter of comparison (see also Deut. 21:15).

The Jews in the time of Christ continued to use this type of expression. Thus it is said in Luke 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father. . . ." whereas Matthew 10:37 says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me. . . ." It is thus clear that "hate" is a relative term that means our love for our parents is like hatred in comparison with the love we should have for Jesus Christ. We are not told to literally hate our loved ones.

Most, if not all, of these idioms and figures of

speech can be easily clarified by consulting a translation in modern English. A good translator will be aware of these expressions and will translate them into the English equivalent if possible. A translation is never as good as the original, of course, and there will invariably be some loss. This loss, however, will not affect our understanding of the basic doctrines and the truth of God's plan and purpose.

CHAPTER V

THE MEANING OF WORDS

Words mean different things to different people. Bible verses have been misunderstood because a wrong meaning was given to a word that was not intended by the writer.

Or the meaning of some phrases and passages may appear obscure.

This obscurity, in many cases, is due to our ignorance of some illustrative fact, or of the exact meaning of words; and many a misunderstood text has been cleared up by larger knowledge and deeper study. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Handbook, p. 260.)

Knowing how words are used in the Bible is essential before finding their correct interpretation. Seeing how words are used in the Bible is more important than what meanings have been given to them by lexicons, dictionaries, and commentaries. These types of books are often based merely on etymology--the origin of words--or on the meaning put on words by tradition, or on how the words were used at some time other than the time at which they were written or spoken in the Bible.

As Angus further says:

The sense of Scripture is to be determined by the words; a true knowledge of the words is fixed by the usage of language. Usage must be ascertained whenever possible from Scripture itself. The words of Scripture must be taken in their common meaning, unless

such meaning is shown to be inconsistent with other words in the sense, with the argument or context, or with other parts of Scripture. (Ibid., p. 180.)

Meaning of Words Can Vary

The usage of a word may change throughout different periods of time. Words are much like coins in that they can differ in meaning between different countries. Their meaning even changes at different periods of time in the same country.

Therefore, we must take great care when we try to find the meaning of words used in the Bible. We must know which English words are no longer used, which usage of English words has been changed, and also which usage of some Greek words has changed.

Not only have there been mistranslations, some English words used in the King James Version have gone out of use altogether!

Some English Words Now Obsolete

When studying the authorized King James Version, we need to keep in mind that it was translated from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts in 1611--over three hundred fifty years ago! Many words and expressions used at that time have since changed in meaning or become totally obsolete and archaic--have gone out of use altogether.

When we come across these words and expressions in the Bible, the correct meaning of the scripture will not always be clear. This is where modern translations are very helpful. All such obscure scriptures should be checked in a modern translation such as the one by James Moffatt or the new Amplified Version.

Some English words have not become obsolete, but have changed in meaning since the King James Version was translated. The word "prevent" is a good example. This word was originally meant to precede or go before, but now means to hinder. I Thessalonians 4:15 should therefore be corrected according to today's English thus: "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep."

The word "charity" is frequently used in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. This word meant love in 1611 A.D. It comes from the old French word charitet which means deariness. This deariness of affection gradually evolved into the mercenary act of giving money which is the origin of our word "charity" as we use it today. But "charity" no longer represents the Greek word agape which should be correctly translated "Love" in I Corinthians 13 instead of "charity."

The Usage of Some Greek Words Changed

Greek is a living language that has changed down through the centuries. When the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write the New Testament in Greek, it inspired them to use old Greek words with a new and expanded meaning attached to them.

The meaning of the Greek word ecclesia was expanded in this way. The Greeks used it only when referring to a town's meeting of its citizens (Acts 19:39), but the New Testament applies it to the assemblies or churches of God's people and to the people in the Church of God themselves. The Greek language was in use at least 1,000 years before Christ during which changes occurred. Regarding these changes of Greek usage made by man, Bullinger says:

But in the course of time the laws which operate to affect and change the usage of words wrought the same inevitable changes in many Greek words. For this reason classical Greek usages are no infallible guide to the usage of Biblical Greek. (E. W. Bullinger, How to Enjoy the Bible, p. 235.)

This is why lexicons may not have the correct meaning of a word if the definition is based on classical Greek. Classical Greek differs in many ways from the koine or "common" Greek used by the apostles. Papyri of documents of all kinds have been dug up in Egypt that are in Greek and belong to mostly the first and second

centuries before and after Christ. They have been a great help in affirming the exact sense and usage of Greek words used during that period.

This information that is continually coming to light sometimes clarifies and gives added meaning to the Scriptures. The Greek word apecho, for example, is generally defined as meaning to have from, to receive or be (distant) from. But the papyri show that it was the common form of giving a receipt in full. This is the way it is used in Matthew 6:2, 5 and 16.

When the hypocrites prayed, they did it to be seen of men. When men had seen them, therefore, they were given their receipt in full, or as the Amplified Bible has it, "they have their reward--in full already." There was nothing more for them to receive. They could expect no real answer to their prayers. Just to say they have their reward does not convey this more accurate sense of the Greek expression.

The papyri have also expounded the meaning of the Greek word charagma which means "a mark."

In the papyri this word (1) is always used for a mark connected with the emperor; and (2) it always contains his name or effigy, and the year of his reign. (3) It was necessary for buying and selling. (4) It was technically known as charagma. (Ibid., p. 241.)

This word is found in all kinds of documents--even on "a bill of sale." In the Book of Revelation, it is

used for the "mark" of the Beast who will be the Overlord of that day.

Greek Words Translated With More Than One Meaning

The Bible uses many Greek words in different connections and with various meanings. Different words in the original Greek (and in Hebrew as well) are often rendered by the same word in English.

Here is where the use of a lexicon and concordance will be a great help. Both Young's Analytical Concordance and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance are excellent for this purpose. With the use of these concordances, the Bible student can see at a glance, under the English word, the Greek word from which it is translated. The index will tell him whether the word is translated otherwise elsewhere--and if so, under what renderings he can find them.

He should turn to every passage where the Greek word is used and note how the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, makes use of that word. When he has all the information before him, he will soon discover whether the usage is uniform or whether one Greek word has been translated as two or more different English words.

This type of study requires a spiritual understanding from God (I John 5:20; I Cor. 2:14), common sense, and strength of mind to follow the leading of God's

Word in spite of what beliefs we have received from tradition.

The Meaning of "Parousia"

One particular sect teaches that Christ is already ruling here on earth. To back up their belief, they state that the word "coming" was not correctly translated in the New Testament and that it should be "presence."

The original Greek word for "coming" is parousia, and can be translated correctly as "presence." But whether this word should be translated "coming" or "presence" really doesn't matter as long as we understand the context of the verses in which this word is used. We can substitute the word "presence" for the word "coming" in the following scriptures: Matthew 24:22-27; I Thesalonians 4:15 and II Peter 3:10-12.

All these scriptures show that the coming or presence of God and Jesus Christ will be accompanied by supernatural events to be seen by everyone on this earth. When Jesus Christ returns to this earth, this world will know when this world-shaking event takes place. It will not be a "secret rapture" or only known to a select group.

Nowhere does the Bible speak of an "invisible second presence" of Jesus Christ. Obviously, Christ's presence cannot be achieved without His coming. Jesus

Christ will come in all His power and glory to put down all opposition and to rule all the nations of the earth with supernatural force. When Christ begins to rule the world, everyone will KNOW it!

Greek Words With a Uniform Usage

Not all Greek words have different usages. The vast majority have but one uniform usage and this should not be departed from in the English translation. Even though the violation of the principle may not lead to a misunderstanding or a wrong interpretation of a passage, it could cause great and unnecessary confusion.

As an example, if we were to make a study of the word "temptation" in the Bible, we would find that it has been translated from two Greek words--peirazo and peirasmos. We would find that the latter Greek word occurs 21 times and is rendered ^{"temptation"} in all but one (I Pet. 4:12 where it is rendered "try").

But peirasmos is always used in the Bible in the sense of trial and especially in the sense of trouble or tribulation, because it is that which really tries a man better than anything else. This is clearly its use in Luke 8:13, "in time of trial, or trouble [not temptation in the sense of enticement, the normal usage of the word] fall away."

From this we can see that the word "temptation" is incorrectly used in Christ's prayer outline when He said, "And lead us not into temptation" (Mat. 6:13). Christ actually said, "Pray that you be not led into TRIAL." Or it could also be translated tribulation which can even include the Great Tribulation.

God will tempt no one (James 1:13). But God does allow trials to come upon us as Christians so that we can overcome and grow in the grace and knowledge of Him. The Israelites were put to trial in the wilderness (Deut. 8:15, 16). God led them into that TRIAL in order to test them.

But, do we need to be constantly led into trials? Can we learn to obey God without Him bringing some trial upon us to help us grow as we should? We should pray that God would give us the strength to obey Him without having difficult trials come upon us. We should pray that God will not have to lead us into TRIALS. If we obey Him and live by His laws, this will not be necessary. But whatever God does will be for our good--whether it be through trials or not (Rom. 8:28).

Sometimes the same original Hebrew or Greek word is rendered by different words in English where it was thought important to have variety. This may lessen the effect of the sentence or suggest a difference in meaning where none exists.

As an example, the Hebrew word sheol and the Greek word hades are rendered thirty-one times as "the grave," thirty-one times as "hell" and three times as "pit."

On the other hand, different Greek words have been rendered with the same English word. An example of this is found in John 21:15-18. The English word "love" was translated from two entirely different Greek words used in this passage. One is agapas and the other is phileis.

Agapas is used to always mean love--any kind of love. It was this word that Jesus used when He addressed Peter in verses 15 and 16. But both times Peter used the word phileis when answering Him. This word simply means friendship or affection--the kind that Peter would naturally have had towards the rest of the disciples. In effect, Christ asked, "Do you love me, Peter?" And Peter replied, "Yes, I like you." But Jesus wanted Peter to love Him with a true spiritual love, with agape, not merely philia.

The third time Jesus put the question to Peter, He used the word phileis, the same word Peter had used to answer Him on the two previous occasions. Peter again used the same word in reply. The great commission that Christ was giving Peter, that of feeding God's people with the true spiritual knowledge that would lead them towards eternal salvation, required the greater, the agape,

kind of love. But Jesus knew that Peter would soon have that deeper, spiritual love after He sent the Holy Spirit.

This real meaning of the original Greek is lost in the King James Version. The Amplified Bible, however, expands the translation and shows the variation.

The peculiarities of the Greek language are nowhere more instructive and beautiful than in the use of the article. But some misunderstand how it is used. The interlinear of the Diaglott, used by the Jehovah's Witnesses, translates John 1:1 as, "In a beginning was the word, and the word was with the God, and a God was the word."

There is no indefinite article in Greek. There is a definite article, however, and whenever it is used, the noun is designated as being specific and is pointed out as a certain one of a class or group. Therefore, "the God" is specifically God the Father in this verse--not just any God.

When the article is not used in the Greek language, a noun then becomes indefinite and generalized. It should be understood, however, that whenever the Greek word Theos is written without the article, this does not mean that it should be translated "a God." When we understand that there is a family of God or a group of God-beings, we can understand the meaning of John 1:1. It should be

correctly translated thus: "In a beginning was the word, and the word was with the God, and a God-being was the Word."

This verse is describing Jesus Christ as being the Word who was with God the Father in the beginning and it shows that Christ also was in the family of God. He was a God-being--a person in the God-family, but apart from the God, God the Father. He was not "a god" or merely one of the innumerable gods of the pagan religions of that time, but He was the One who became the only begotten Son of God. When all these facts are put together, the meaning of this verse becomes very plain.

The rule to remember when trying to solve this type of difficulty is: Get the most reliable text, find the exact and literal meaning of the text and then note the exact force and precise meaning of each word used.

The precise meaning of words can be important in understanding some scriptures. Notice that II Corinthians 3:7 is about the ministration of death written and engraven in STONES--not TABLETS of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. These whole stones are mentioned in Deuteronomy 27:1-6 on which was written the CIVIL LAW--the statutes and judgments--which included the administration of the death penalty (see the article by Mr. Meredith, Is Obedience to God Required for Salvation?).

In Ephesians 4:26 it says to "Be angry and sin not." This is not anger in the ordinary sense, but rather righteous indignation. Christ felt this kind of anger at the hardness of men's hearts (Mark 3:5). But even righteous indignation must not exceed proper limits. If one must be angry--that is, righteously indignant--let it not become sin.