

UPON THE ROCK

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GOD'S HOLY WORD

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Upon the Rock is published bimonthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

Mark Reynolds, Editor

Larry G. Reynolds, Co-Editor

Jim Witty, Printer

mreyn8391@comcast.net

How Did We Get the Bible?

Patrick Morrison

In a nation built upon freedom and liberty, we often take for granted the great privileges afforded us in this country. Our Constitution guarantees us certain freedoms, among these being the freedom of religion. We are able to run out and buy a Bible for next to nothing in our nation, and most families have two, three, four or more Bibles in their possession. We often take for granted this magnificent blessing. Because the Bible is so abundant in our land, we may never have stopped to consider how we came to have the Bible in the first place. Is the Bible I have really God's word? How can I rest assured that the copy of the Bible I have in my hands has truly been delivered faithfully from God to man? Is the Bible just a product of man's contrivance, or is it in truth the word of God, a revelation of Divine wisdom which will lead all who follow it to eternal bliss in heaven?

The Bible makes numerous claims to be the word of God. Over two hundred times in the Old Testament can one find phrases such as, "And the Lord spake unto...", "And Moses spake all the words which the Lord commanded him... ," etc. In the New Testament, Paul told the young preacher Timothy that, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The word translated "inspiration" comes from the Greek *theophneustos*, literally meaning God-breathed. That is, every word of the Bible came directly from the mouth of God. Just how did God go about transmitting His spoken word into written form, such that we as feeble creatures could know and understand God's will for us? The Bible gives us insight as to how God accomplished the task of seeing that His will was put into written form, and preserved so that all generations may come to know Him and be saved through His Son. David proclaimed, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). To the young prophet Jeremiah God would say, "But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. . . Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Hear - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).

Believe - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).

Repent - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).

Confess - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).

Be baptized - (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

my words in thy mouth” (Jeremiah 1:7,9). Peter would write, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:19-21). God, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, guided these men as they wrote the Scriptures. God selected every last word, ensuring that His will would be given to man exactly as He wanted.

Some might ask, “But how can I be confident that the Bible has come to me as God gave it, when it has been some 2000 years since it was written’?” Consider that the Bible was written by approximately 40 men over a period of about 1600 years. In spite of differences in education, social status, wealth, vocation, etc., these 40 men were used by God to put His word into written form, and all without error or inconsistency of any kind! What makes God’s word even more amazing is that there is no disagreement with what Moses wrote in the book of Genesis, to what John wrote in the Revelation. Hundreds of years between the two, and not one error of any kind to be found in God’s Holy Word! God completed His revelation to man at the close of the first century, when John wrote the final book of the Bible. If God could complete the Bible through the hands of these men over such a long period of time, then certainly God could see that His word has been faithfully preserved down to this moment in time for us today.

The Bible has come to us today just as it was originally written. The Old Testament was written primarily in the Hebrew language, while the New Testament was written in koine (common) Greek [a dead language now, somewhat akin to modern Greek]. Through the years, the Bible was translated into various languages. For centuries, the Catholic Church saw to it that the Bible was only translated into Latin. This ensured that only the well-educated could understand the Scriptures. Since each copy of the Scriptures was hand-copied, individual copies of the Bible were few and far between. The cost to produce them and the time involved in transcribing them caused the churches literally to chain the Bible to the pulpit. With the invention of the printing press, and the clamoring of some who called for translations of the Scriptures into the language of the common people, the Bible soon found its way into the hands of most every

family. Men like Martin Luther arose, translating the Scriptures into German. Others such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale translated the Bible into English. With each translation of the Scriptures into another language, great care was taken to ensure that it was translated faithfully.

With each passing day, more and more evidence is uncovered that lends further proof to the accuracy of Bible translations. One needs to do a little research when selecting a Bible translation. Some “translations” are nothing more than commentaries, meaning that an individual or committee puts what they think the Bible says rather than offering a literal translation of the Scriptures. The New International Version, Today’s English Version, his Translation, and many others are nothing more than commentaries in disguise. There are many reliable translations that are readily available to anyone. These would include the King James Version, the New King James Version, the American Standard Version, and the English Standard Version. These (particularly the KJV and ASV) have stood the test of time, and have proven over and over again to be very, very accurate translations of both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

How did we get the Bible? God, in His great love and mercy, revealed to us His will through the hands of faithful men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit to preserve God’s word in written form for all generations. Let us not take for granted how we got the Bible; let us not take for granted that we have the Bible. Let us thank God daily that He has allowed us the opportunity to know Him, and to be saved eternally by following His will. Because God made sure His word was transmitted to us faithfully, we can say as did the psalmist, “For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

Can Man Understand the Bible?

Jim Bullington

Is this even a relevant question in the 21st century? Is there anyone out there who even believes that it is important to understand the

what you are wanting. Some are very in depth, technical and analytical, while others are “layman” commentaries. Equally varied are the prices of commentary sets. Some can be purchased for less than one hundred dollars, while others can be as much as five hundred. When purchasing a commentary set the most important thing to consider is the soundness of the material. There are a number of faithful brethren from the church of Christ who have written commentaries on the entire Bible. The James Burton Coffman series, the Leon Stancliff series and the Gospel Advocate series are three that I would recommend. While no work of man is infallible, these three sets are all faithful and sound. A good commentary set can assist you in understanding difficult passages from the Bible, as well as giving you detailed background and introductory information.

An investment of less than five hundred dollars could yield decades worth of information and valuable study helps that would encourage your spiritual growth and increased knowledge. In closing, allow me to repeat what I stated in the outset of this article. No book of man can replace or compare to the Word of God and no other book but the Bible is needed for one to learn what to do to be saved and go to heaven after death. These books listed are just a few of the many tools and aids available to us that will help us make the most of our Bible study.

(Note: Most, if not all of these books can be purchased through Christian bookstores. If you are having difficulty locating one or all of these books, contact Sain Publications at 931 363 6905 or visit them on the web at www.sainpublications.com. You can also contact Christian Family Book Store at 1 800 782 8175).

Corinthians; 5. Notable Passages From First Corinthians; 6. True Views of Spiritual Truths in First Corinthians. Under each of these major headings are several sub-headings that explain, in greater detail, pertinent information from each book. Know your Bible is an ideal book for one who is young in the faith and may not have a great deal of knowledge about the Bible as a whole. It is a great companion book for anyone who is reading through their Bible, or focusing their study on a single book, because it teaches you a little bit about all of the books of the Bible.

Ready Reference For Growing Christians

In listing a “top five” list of Bible study tools that I find most valuable, one is nearer to my heart than all others. My preacher, co-worker, mentor, father in the faith, Paul Sain compiled the material for this book over the course of many years.

Originally this book started out as a detailed filing system and gradually evolved into a powerfully effective study aid. The Ready Reference For Growing Christians is a reference book for over ninety Bible subjects, along with a few facts concerning the mainline denominations. For example, if you were interested in learning what the Bible says about sin, you could look up sin in the table of contents and turn to the corresponding pages. Listed on this page would be a number of Bible verses dealing with the subject of sin. However, it is not just a listing of verses; most subjects are outlined with several descriptive points. Another benefit of this book is that it can be taken and used as a sermon outline or devotional book. I highly recommend this book for new Christians, those young in the faith, or those looking for a little help in preparing sermons or devotional talks. There are currently two versions of this book: the standard edition (\$5.95), which contains detailed information and important questions to ask, concerning denominations, and the pocket edition (\$3.95) which contains all of the topics and Scriptures, only omitting the denominational information.

Commentary

Every Bible student can benefit from a good commentary set. There are several different ones from which to choose, depending upon

Bible? If it is important to understand the Bible, just how important is it? Having posed some questions for focus, we will proceed to address the question posed by the title of this article.

First, we will define the word understand. Then we will make some affirmations in the form of, “Man cannot understand the Bible if..” Finally we will make other affirmations in the form of; “Man can understand the Bible if..”.

It really is important to understand what we mean by understand. If the question is this: “Can any one man understand fully everything that the Bible teaches about every subject contained within it?” then the answer is, “No!” But of course neither does any one man understand all about every aspect of mathematics, or biology, or astronomy, or physics, or ad infinitum. Yet, we don’t throw out what we can know because of what we can’t know. How absurd! But, if the question is this: “Can any one man understand enough of the Bible to please God and go to heaven?” the answer is, “Yes!” We will have more to say about this in the closing paragraph of this article.

Now to some, “Man cannot understand the Bible if..” statements. Man cannot understand the Bible if he approaches it with a closed mind. This could be merely having the idea that he can’t understand, or that he already knows what it means before he studies it. In either case, his mind is closed. Man cannot understand the Bible unless he has some intention of understanding and applying it to his life. The truths of the Bible build upon one another. Some things cannot be understood until simpler things are mastered. Man cannot understand the Bible if he approaches it with damning biases against it. While it might be true that all of us have some biases, it is untrue that our biases have to be of the nature that they blind our eyes to truth. Man cannot understand the Bible if he places himself above the authors of the Bible. Those who perceive their own wisdom as superior to the inspired scriptures have missed the first wicket! They cannot win! Man cannot understand the Bible if he neglects its diligent study. No one said it is easy, but like most good things, it can be achieved if diligently pursued.

Now to some, “Man can understand the Bible if..” statements. These will require a bit more discussion so each of them will be set off as a paragraph.

Man can understand the Bible if God is its author — and He is. It contains truths that are too precious to have originated from man such as the golden rule (Matthew 7.12). It contains scientific and medical facts that could not otherwise have been known such as the place that blood would have in the physical and spiritual life of mankind (Genesis 9.4, Leviticus 17.11, and John 6.53-54). It contains predictions that came true with uncanny abilities beyond those of mere men. For instance, Isaiah predicted that a man by the name of Cyrus would conquer the enemies of Israel and permit the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Isaiah 44.28-45.1). This is amazing in that Isaiah wrote 150 years before the event!

Man can understand the Bible if ordinary rules of grammar and reasoning were used in the composition of the Bible— and they were. From the very beginning of time, God began by speaking, communicating by means of human languages. When He put man in the Garden, He spoke to him and gave him vital instructions (see Genesis 1-3). God made man such that languages would be the staple of his communication methods. Hearing, reasoning, deducing, applying, and obeying are all part of the faculties God gave to man. God gave man the faculties to understand and then wrote the Bible in a manner that those faculties could be used to understand its meaning.

Man can understand the Bible if its individual books were intended to be viewed as the authoritative word of God — and they were. Jesus spoke plainly and often of the Old Testament scriptures and referred to them as God’s word. On the first such occasion when He was face to face with Satan, Jesus opted to quote from the writings of Moses. He prefaced these passages with the formula “*It is written...*” prior to responding to the three specific temptations thrown at Him (Matthew 4.1-11). Paul knew that his writings came with God’s own authority as demonstrated by a number of passages (see I Corinthians 14.37 & Ephesians 3.1-5).

If you are looking for every verse in the Bible that mentions the name of Abidan (there are five: Numbers 1:11; 2:22; 7:60,65; 10:24) or how many times the word yellow is used (four: Leviticus 13:30,32,36; Psalm 68:13), Strong’s can help you find them. If you wonder what the original word and definition of sin is (hamartia: offence, sin, trespass, to miss the mark), Strong’s can help you do that. One of the greatest benefits of this tool is that you get your money’s worth. The book is over two thousand pages of extremely helpful information and can be bought for usually less than twenty dollars.

Smith’s Bible Dictionary

Written by William Smith, Smith’s Bible Dictionary is another Bible study tool that has stood the test of time. Originally written in 1863, it is still used daily by preachers and Bible students the world over. This book functions just like any other dictionary. There are over six thousand detailed definitions, articles and illustrations on a great variety of Bible people, places and words. The dust jacket on my copy boasts that this dictionary gives you things others do not. Namely, “not just definitions of biblical terms, but details about the Bible, its history, selling, geography, characters and doctrines... .Discover things you never knew about prophets, priests, kings, queens, tribes and nations, traditions, customs, idols, trees, herbs, flowers, weights and measures, diseases and musical instruments. This is a tool that lists and defines everything and everyone in the Bible from Aaron to the Zuzim, and all for less than ten dollars.

Know Your Bible

Know Your Bible is a book that is not nearly as old or well known as the previous two, but it is by no means inferior in usefulness to the Bible student. Written by a faithful Gospel preacher named Frank Dunn (father of country music star Holly Dunn) in 1997, Know Your Bible gives a brief, yet thorough, overview of all 66 books of the Bible. Each Bible book in this six hundred fifty page volume is examined in much the same way. For example, the chapter on 1 Corinthians has six major headings:

1. Keys to the Epistle; 2. The Purpose of First Corinthians; 3. Central Messages of First Corinthians; 4. Main Points In Each Chapter of First

or who would you choose?" If I had to answer that question seriously, I would answer, "My Bible."

In my library I have several hundred books. Some are of great value; some are of little value, but none can compare in value to my leather bound library of sixty-six books known as the Bible. If you want to know what I think of the Bible just read Psalm 119. There is no book greater than the Bible, no book equal to the Bible and no book like the Bible. Let me state emphatically that a person can live and die and go to heaven without having read any book other than the Bible. We are able to study and understand the Scriptures without the aid of any books of men. "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). This is not to say that all that is written in the Scriptures is easy to comprehend by casual reading, but with diligent study (2 Timothy 2:15) we can know the will of God as revealed in His Word.

All of this being said, there are some books written by men that can serve as an aid or a tool to help us better understand and apply the things written in God's Word. I would like to share with you a few of these books that have helped me, and I am convinced will help you, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

A concordance is an alphabetical list of the words in a book, with references to the passages in which they occur. Strong's is one of the longest standing, most accurate and best respected Bible concordances available. It was compiled by Dr. James Strong over one hundred ten years ago and took him over thirty-five years to compile. Each word of the King James Version of the Bible (with the exception of articles like a, an, and, the, etc) is listed, along with every passage in which each word appears. Each word is given a number that corresponds with the original Greek or Hebrew word, along with the definition of that original word. What this means is that a person need not be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to gain a better understanding of the meaning of the original words.

Man can understand the Bible if its heroes are to be trusted — and they are. For instance, Peter wrote about Paul's writings, classing them with the rest of the scriptures. "... [Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Peter 3:14-16). Peter stated that there are some things hard to be understood with the common inference being that there are also some things that are relatively easy to be understood. If Peter's view is of any validity, it becomes obvious that he believed that men could, with diligent study and consideration, understand the writings of Paul, even the more difficult writings.

So, can man understand the Bible? The answer must be yes if the Bible is what it presents itself to be as argued in the previous comments. When one argues that the Bible cannot be understood, they wittingly or otherwise throw an accusation in the face of God, the author of the Bible. God will determine man's accountability by considering, among other thing, the abilities that they severally had. For those who are genuinely unable to understand (such as infants, toddlers, and mentally impaired) He will make just provision. However, it is highly doubtful if anyone intelligent enough to make the argument that the Bible cannot be understood will find themselves in that class of folk! Speaking from my personal preference, I just don't think that I would want to take the chance that God will class me with men of diminished mental capacities in order to be saved. Others may put me there and I may belong there, but I am not willing to run that risk. Men can understand the Bible, and if any truly can't God will deal justly with them!

One does not have to understand everything in order to understand some things. One thing we can understand is that we will be judged by the word of God in the last day (John 12:48). And another thing is that accountable people who have not obeyed the gospel at the time of Jesus' return will be lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

THE BIBLE FULFILLS OUR EVERY NEED

Phil Gear

God knows that man is a spiritual being, as well as a physical one. So he provided for our spiritual needs with an amazing volume of sixty-six books that contains everything we need to be right with Him. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:3-4) In this noteworthy passage we are told of the all-sufficiency of the Bible to meet our spiritual needs.

The Bible is sufficient because of its **DIVINE ORIGIN**. It stems directly from God’s “divine power”. “Divine” is from the same original word as “God”, and so God, himself; is the power behind the Bible. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof; for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The phrase, “inspiration of God” literally means “God-breathed.” It did not come from human intelligence, but directly from the mind of God. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter 1:20-21) Could anyone doubt that God has the power and ability to author a book that meets all of our deepest needs?

The Bible fulfills all our needs **COMPLETELY**. He “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” If all has been given, nothing is lacking. The Bible meets every need we have in the realm of life and godliness. It is able to thoroughly furnish us “unto all good works”. (2 Timothy 3:17) Since it is the only book that comes from God, it is the only book capable of meeting man’s spiritual needs. Other books claim to answer man’s spiritual needs, but they are simply man’s opinion about spiritual things. God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, has chosen to meet those needs through

2. **Some fail to consider that God may not intend to fulfill a promise until many years after it is made.** Peter indicated that in the last days scoffers would say “Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Of course, all things do not continue as they were from the beginning; a misconception which Peter dispels by reminding his audience that the world was once overflowed with water (2 Peter 3:5-7). The implication, however, seems to be that with the passing of time God’s promises become less certain. While this may be true of some men it most certainly is not true of God. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise,” and the only reason the Lord has not yet returned is because He is longsuffering (2 Peter 3:9). Time does not affect God’s promises. Whether a day has passed, or a thousand years since the time God issued a promise, the Omniscient will not forget to keep it (2 Peter 3:8).

Conclusion

God is bound by His nature to keep His promises. His faithfulness enables the child of God to have hope, which serves as an anchor of the soul throughout the storms of life (Hebrews 6:18-19). Let it be remembered that God’s promises are often conditioned upon man’s response. Whether a person is a recipient of those “great and precious promises,” or “tribulation and anguish,” it will be determined by the life he lives (2 Peter 1:4; Romans 2:6-11; 1 John 2:24-25). When God promises the righteous that he will live, this is conditioned upon the response of the righteous. When God promises the wicked that he will die, this too is conditioned upon the response of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:13-16). It is certain that God will be faithful to us. Let us, likewise, be faithful to him.

Good Bible Study Tool

Brandon Britton

At some time or another most all of us have played the game where the hypothetical question is asked, “If you were stranded on a deserted island and could only have one book/person with you, what

promise it is already clear that the fulfillment of that promise would not be inconsistent with His nature. Also, if God makes a promise it is certain that He can fulfill it, for the Almighty's purpose cannot be thwarted by a lesser power.

3. The omniscience of God. To say that God is omniscient is to say that He is all knowing. The psalmist has written "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). Similarly, God said "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9-10). If God's understanding is infinite and He can declare the end from the beginning, He can see the outcome of every promise He makes. God would not be acting in accordance with His holiness if He made a promise knowing in advance that He would not keep it. If God makes a promise it is because, through His infinite understanding, He has already seen its fulfillment.

Why Might Some Question The Faithfulness of God?

There have always been, and will continue to be, those who doubt God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. This may be accounted for, in some cases, by the failure to consider the characteristics of some of God's promises.

1. Some fail to consider the conditional nature of some of God's promises. When David learned of Saul's intention to attack the city of Keilah he had two questions for the LORD; "will Saul come down," and "will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand?" God told David that Saul would come down and the men of Keilah would deliver him up (1 Samuel 23:9-12). Neither of these happened, however, because David and his men departed out of the city of Keilah (1 Samuel 23:13). David understood that God's promise, or prediction, was predicated upon his remaining in the city of Keilah. When David altered the conditions by leaving the city, God's promise was no longer applicable. If, on the other hand, David had remained in the city Saul most certainly would have come down and the men of Keilah surely would have delivered him up.

the Bible. Because of his great love, he has left us lacking nothing. We must simply avail ourselves of those great blessing by reading and heeding the Bible.

Through the Bible we gain the "knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue". Tragically, many lead lives of disgrace and sin, not glory and virtue. Such is the usual result of man living by his own ideas and principles. But the knowledge God provides through his Word can make all the difference. It changes our direction, goals, purpose, priorities, and values. It guides us into ways that elevate our lives to a higher plane. It enlightens us to a much better way of living. Greater knowledge of him results in our being distinguished as those living lives of "glory and virtue".

Trusting God enough to obey him makes available to us his "exceeding great and precious promises". And what beautiful promises those are! Salvation. Forgiveness. Hope. A right relationship with God. Prayer. Heaven. The list of his beautiful promises is endless. God has not only provided all of these for us, but has told us in his inspired word how to obtain them.

There are two beautiful aspects of these promises. For one, they enable us to be "partakers of the divine nature". "Partaker" means "sharer, joint-participant". As amazing as it sounds, God has provided, through his word, the way for us to be sharers in his divine nature. Those in the world live "in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), but Christians live as those who share in the nature of God. We are "partakers of his holiness." (Hebrews 12:10) He gives us explicit instructions as to how we can become more like Him. The Bible teaches us to practice those principles and attitudes that are characteristic of God. Principles such as forgiveness, holiness, righteousness, and commitment to the cause of God. Jesus says such will make us "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Those of the world can live as their father, the Devil (John 8:44), but we can live and share in the nature of God himself.

The second aspect of God's precious promises is the privilege of "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." This

decaying world will ultimately be destroyed. If, because of our lusts, we choose to participate or share in that corruption, we can only expect to share in the world's ultimate end, as well. Those fleshly lusts, if unchecked in our lives, will finally destroy us. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17) Only by escaping the corruption of the world can we hope to escape its inevitable end. And only through the Bible can we escape that corruption. The Bible is the only book that fulfills our need to escape the ultimate destruction of the world.

Sadly, many live and die without ever knowing the wonderful blessings God makes available through His word. Striving to find their own way, they flounder through life with little or no understanding of why they are here, and where they are going. Relying solely on their own wisdom, or that of other human beings, they never find the true direction and purpose in their lives. If they would turn to God and study his word, they would not make the wrong turns that can ruin this life, and destroy the next one. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." (Proverbs 3:5-8) "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105) Those who follow the teachings of God find that life goes better, the headaches are fewer, and the future is brighter. God has provided, through his Word, all of those things for which mankind so diligently searches. There is no spiritual need not fulfilled by the Bible. May we be more persistent in striving to understand and follow its teachings. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
2863 East High St. Springfield, OH 45505 ehighcoc@juno.com

The Faithfulness of God

The bible explicitly affirms the faithfulness of God. At God's behest, Balaam declared "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). Paul, likewise, proclaimed "But **as God is true** ("as God is faithful—ASV), our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. **For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen**, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1:18-20). God's promises are not matters of uncertainty ("yea and nay"). That God is faithful is beyond dispute, for all His promises find their affirmation (their "Amen") in Jesus Christ.

The faithfulness of God is a consequence of His nature. Consider the following divine attributes which necessitate the keeping of all of God's promises:

1. The holiness of God. To say that God is holy is to say that He is perfect in goodness and righteousness. He is separated from all things wicked and sinful. God proclaimed His holiness to Israel when He said "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). Sometimes the statement is made, "God can do anything." This simply is not true. God cannot do anything that would be contrary to His nature, of which holiness is a part. One thing God cannot do is lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:17-18). God could never, therefore, make a promise that He knew He would not keep. Neither could God make a promise that, by its fulfillment, would constitute a violation of His nature. Rest assured that if God has made a promise He will keep it.

2. The omnipotence of God. To say that God is omnipotent is to say that God is all powerful. Jeremiah the prophet declared, "Ah Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jeremiah 32:17). As has already been indicated, when it is said that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37), this must be understood within the context of the holiness of God. If God makes a

because you do not ask” (James 4:2). All too often we underestimate the power of prayer. It has well been said that you can truly only understand Scripture on your knees. Pray to God for understanding. Pray to God that great truths be revealed to you. Pray to God that your life be bettered through His word. With God on our side, much can be accomplished (James 5:16).

Conclusion

The sooner we learn the Scriptures the better. Timothy knew the Scriptures from childhood (2 Timothy 3:15). The word of God equips us for completion of life and every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). It is all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Keep studying, seriously studying, and greater understanding will come - even of the difficult passages.

Edd Sterchi may be reached at 727 W. Sloan St., Harrisburg, IL. 62946, or by email at sterchi@midwest.net

PROMISES OF THE BIBLE

By A.J. Cox

A promise is “a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified.” It is “a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act.” (Miriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition). The bible literally abounds with promises. Generally speaking there are two kinds of promises. There are promises made by God and there are promises made by God’s creatures. These promises differ in nature by virtue of the difference between God and His creatures. God *always* keeps His promises; His creatures, however, do not. Of course the most important promises are those made by God, and a person would do well to remember why God’s promises are certain.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFICULT PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE

Edd Sterchi

Introduction

There are many aids to understanding the Bible: books, people, the Internet, etc. All of these are indeed valuable, but none can replace the greatest tool of all to understanding the Bible—study. The fact remains that most people do not understand passages of the Bible, difficult or otherwise, simply because they do not take the time to studiously read it. Therefore, pointers on how to study the Bible should go a long way toward aiding in understanding the difficult passages therein. Once we learn how to study, we can easily dig into the simple messages and concepts, and as we gain greater knowledge, we will then desire to mine even deeper and find the rich treasures that God has put there.

TO UNDERSTAND DIFFICULT PASSAGES WE MUST STUDY THE BIBLE...

...PROPERLY

Paul encouraged the young preacher Timothy to be sure that he was “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). To properly divide God’s word, we must properly study it.

Studying properly involves carefully examining the content of the passage. What dispensational time period is it? Who is the author of the book? What is the background of the book/passage? Who is talking? Who is it being written to? What is the historical setting? Are the commands given valid for us today? Some are, some are not. For example, Matthew 10:5-10 (the limited commission) applied to the apostles, not us, but Matthew 28:19-20 (the great, or unlimited commission) applies to all Christians.

A difficult passage for some is 1 Corinthians 7:8, where Paul seems to indicate that it is better not to marry. But knowing that impending

distress and an era of persecution were coming (see 1 Corinthians 7:26, 29) helps us to understand why it might be better not to be married and have a family at that particular time. By the way, here is where reference works can help us. Good Bible reference materials include Bible handbook, commentaries, atlases, dictionaries, concordances, study guides, etc. There will be cost incurred in acquiring them, but the knowledge gained is well worth it.

Also in studying the Bible properly, we need to let the Bible be its own commentary whenever possible. The Bible is perfectly harmonious, and sometimes certain passages will help to explain other more difficult ones. For example, some read Luke 14:26 and are confused by Jesus' command to "hate his father and mother." After all, shouldn't we love everyone? But Matthew 10:37 explains what Jesus meant, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." So it's still okay to love our parents, we just shouldn't love them more than Jesus.

To study the Bible properly is going to take a lot of dedication and time, but it will yield much precious fruit.

...PURPOSEFULLY

After hearing Paul speak to them, Acts 17:11 says that the noble Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily" to find out whether what they had heard was true or not. To search the Bible in such a detailed way would be to do so with a purpose in mind.

One needs to study the Scriptures with a definite purpose (there is a difference between reading, which is important, and studying, which is also important). Just simply reading the Bible from Genesis to the maps is good, but can be confusing. Many of the books of the Bible are not in chronological order. For example, Ezra and Nehemiah describe events after Judah has returned from Babylonian captivity, yet in the Bible, they come before the books of Daniel and Ezekiel which were written during the captivity.

The best way is to study the Bible is passage by passage, section by section, book by book. This reveals the overview of what God

designed for that particular writing. You can branch off into other studies while in a certain book or section (topic studies, checking cross references, etc.) but let the main passage you are studying be the foundation of your study (study with it in mind, always come back to it, etc.).

We need to have a specific plan and purpose in mind if we are to gain the greatest benefit from our Bible study.

...PENSIVELY

David meditated upon God's law all day long (Psalm 119:97). How important it is to meditate upon what we have studied (Psalm 1:2). Many times after reading and studying, further meditation will make clear previously muddy passages. Biblical truths become even more evident upon further reflection. An important part of this is the memorization of Scripture (Psalm 119:11, 16). When we memorize it, it becomes easier to meditate upon.

Study small enough sections of Scripture to ensure proper thought is given to them throughout the day. Then by day's end, after mulling it over in your mind many times, greater understanding usually results.

...PERSISTENTLY

Christians should desire to read the Bible a lot (1 Peter 2:2). Having a desire should create a regular reading and study schedule. Having a regular habit of Bible study will result in better knowledge. Better knowledge of the Scriptures lends itself to better understanding of difficult passages. I recommend that you read at the same time and place each day. Get rid of all distractions so you can concentrate. Remember that the best thing for a leather Bible is a daily dose of palm oil! And keep at it; do not become discouraged.

...PRAYERFULLY

James 1:5 reminds us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." James also wrote in his epistle, "you do not have