

617 Can I understand the Bible?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Some people look at the Bible and shake their heads, not knowing what to make of it. Can we understand the Bible? Of all the books in the library, no book is more precious and more valuable than the Bible. It lifts men up to greater morals and greater character; it teaches honesty and love. The Bible answers the most important questions of life: where we came from, why we are here, and where are we going after life is over. Only the Bible can point us to God who created us and gave us life. Only the Bible can teach us the truth about Jesus, why He came to this earth and how we can find the forgiveness of our sins. Only the Bible can teach us right and wrong. How sad that anyone would think we cannot understand it! So we ask, Can we understand the Bible?

David said in Psalm 19:7-11, "The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward." David only had the Law, which seems very hard to us, and yet he spoke of it as a delight.

David could not only understand the Law but could see the value of applying it to his life. In Psalm 1:1-3, David said, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers." Again, this sounds like a man who understands and sees the value of thinking about God's word night and day. David saw how the word of God would prosper him in all that he does.

I pray, my friend, that you too can see the value of a serious study of the word of God. The more you study it, the more it will help you in your life. Paul said, "Do your best ('study,' KJV) to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). God wants all of us to do our best to know His word and to handle it accurately or rightly. Perhaps one reason people get confused about the Bible is that they have never taken the time to study the Bible for themselves. Many people depend upon preachers and teachers to tell them what the Bible says. If you are depending on someone else, you could easily get fooled or misled.

Just because someone claims to know the Bible doesn't mean he is teaching it correctly. Jesus said in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." There are false teachers in our world today, who preach things that simply are not so and lead people astray from the truth. They are wolves but pretend to be sheep, so that they can exploit others. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." Now, the Lord never intended for there to be thousands of churches teaching thousands of things. He came to establish only one body, one church, and He wants all people to understand the gospel and to obey it.

The best thing you can do is begin studying the Bible for yourself. If you are not familiar with the Bible, I would suggest you open your Bible up to the Table of Contents at the front. You see, the Bible is not a single book but a library of 66 books, divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament

tells the stories of the earliest times, of Moses, and the nation of Israel and its prophets. The New Testament tells of Jesus, the apostles, and the church. The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different authors. It contains stories, poetry, songs, proverbs, and prophetic writings within its pages. So you can see the Bible contains a lot of history behind it.

One of the best things you can do as you read your Bible is to get a study Bible with a little introduction to each book. You see, each of these books were written at a specific time and for a specific purpose. The more you know about the individual books, the more the Bible will come alive for you and be meaningful. You should know who said what to whom, when they said it, and what circumstances led up to the discussion. If you just pick up the Bible and start reading anywhere, you may miss the real point of the passage. Always read the Bible in context. Try to discover what the author was intending to say in the passage. Many people misunderstand the Bible because they miss the context.

Not every commandment of the Bible is for every one. Some commandments were only for the people to whom they were given. Paul said in Romans 3:19, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law." God told Noah to build an ark, but we today are under no obligation to build one. God told Abraham to leave his home and family, but we are not under that obligation. The covenant God made with Israel was not binding on Gentiles or with anyone but Israel. In Deuteronomy 5:1-3 Moses said, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today." In the following verses, Moses reveals God's Ten Commandments, which He says is a law for Israel. Christians today are not under the covenant God made then. Rather we are under a new covenant, brought to us by Jesus and ratified by His blood. Jeremiah prophesied in Jer. 31:31-34 that God would establish a new covenant that was unlike the old one. People were born into the old covenant and then had to learn about it. But people would first learn about Jesus and then choose to be part of the new covenant. Our relationship with God today is through Christ. You and I today will not be judged by that old covenant but by the words that Jesus spoke. Jesus said in John 12:48, "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day." So when I read the Bible, which is inspired—every word of it—I remember that the Old Testament was written for Israel, while the New Testament was written for Christians. So if I want to know how to live, what God wills for me, I will go to the New Testament. This does not mean that I believe the Old Testament is not God's Word or that it has no value to Christians. I believe the Old Testament is truly the Word of God.

Paul said in Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Stories about Noah and Abraham and Joseph and Moses and Joshua and Ruth and Esther and David and Solomon and the kings of Judah do give encouragement and hope. They assure me that God will be with me. But I do not go to those passages to learn how to be a Christian or what God wills for the church, I go to the New Testament. God reveals His will for Christians today in the books of the New Testament. And yes, they are written so that you can read and understand.

Jesus promises in John 8:31-32, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." When you read God's Word and live by it, you will know the truth! You will know what is right. In John 16:12-13 Jesus promised the apostles who wrote the New Testament, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." They wrote down that truth, which can be known, believed, and obeyed. It will bring us eternal life.

John wrote in John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs (miracles) in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John was saying not only can you read what I have written; but if you will believe it, it will bring you eternal life. God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). The Bible is God's gift to us to teach us that saving knowledge of His will so that we can be forgiven of sin and live with Him forever. The Bible is wonderful! It contains the message of life!

The more you read it, the more you will believe. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." The Bible is a gift of God for life and faith and hope. This is why Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). No only can we know the word of God, it can feed us spiritually and enrich our hearts and lives. David spoke of the word's value in keeping him safe. In Psalm 119:9, David asked, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." Again David says in verse 11, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." The word of God guides us, protects us, and helps us avoid the pitfalls of life. David would never have talked this way if the word of God could not be understood. We can know it, live it, and love it. David treasured up the word of God, and anyone who loves God will love what His word can do for them. Oh yes, we can know the will of God for our lives. Paul said in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." We can know it and prove it our lives.

Luke wrote his gospel account to be understood and believed. Luke 1:1-4 says, "In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it out* for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." He believed that this Gentile official could read and understand what he wrote and know the exact truth about Jesus Christ and His teachings.

Someone says, "Phil, don't you know that Peter said Paul wrote some things hard to understand?" Yes, I am aware of 2 Peter 3:16 where Peter says some things are difficult, which the "untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." But just because something is hard to understand does not mean that it is impossible to understand. The fact that some untaught and unstable people distort the truth and lead people astray means that we must work hard to learn just what God says and what God wills for our lives. Just like any kind of learning, the study of the Bible demands some effort on our part.

Solomon said, "Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding." (Prov. 23:23). Coming to know the truth does cost something. It costs time and effort to read the Scriptures. You may have to look up some words to find out their meaning. You may have to consult a Bible dictionary to learn about the time and culture of the Bible, but these things are available at bookstores and online, if you are willing to take the time to research them. Do not simply accept what people say; find out for yourself what the word of God teaches and follow that teaching rather than feelings or assumptions. Don't be one of the misled by failing to study for yourself.

The word of God is a wonderful gift with many blessings. James said in James 1:25 that the "one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." You too can be a partaker of God's grace by believing in the Lord and obeying the gospel by repenting of your sins, confessing that Jesus is Lord and Christ, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Won't you do that today?

If you *know* the will of God, do you *live* what you know? James said in James 4:17, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." It is never enough simply to buy the truth and know it. After one has gotten wisdom and understanding, one must live it out in his life. Christianity is a life to be known and loved and lived, not merely to be talked about. My friend, I don't know where you are in your walk with the Lord; but if you haven't been living your faith, you are taking a gamble with your soul. The best thing you can do today is to start attending church once again and start studying your Bible. Find the truth and obey it. Don't waste any more of your life wondering about in doubt.

Jesus promised, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Don't miss out on the greatest grace, the greatest freedom, the greatest love, the greatest hope, and the greatest peace, all of which are found in only one place, the Bible. It's God's gift to you, if you are willing to study that word. Perhaps the reason so many people lack these things is because they have looked every but to the word of God. Don't do like many and shut God out of your lives. Give Him an opportunity to bless your life and fill you with the joy of grace and hope. Come to His word and find His promises and His way is filled with blessing and good things. It is here for you, if you will accept it.

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