

# HOW TO SOLVE BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

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

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

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

## The Foundation of All Knowledge

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

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

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

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

## Expect to Find Difficulties and Have Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The more you study the Bible, the

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

### The Reason for Difficulties

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

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

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

### Difficulties Are a Stumbling Block

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

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

The parables of Christ, for example, were for this purpose of hiding the true meaning of Christ's teaching (Mat. 13:13-15). The Bible was not written in a clear-cut, right-down-the-line manner. In order for it to be preserved for us today, it had to be written in a way so people could interpret it to suit themselves, and so the atheists, agnostics and critics could find fault with it and "*stumble at the word*, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed" (1 Peter 2:8). Also see Isaiah 28:9-13.

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

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

### Attitude Is Key Factor

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

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

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

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

### Methods of Bible Study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### One Study Method

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

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

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

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

#### Analyze What You Read

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

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

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

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

# HOW TO SOLVE BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

*Apparent contradictions and other Bible difficulties are due mainly to carelessness in reading the Bible. This article shows how many difficulties can be solved by studying more carefully.*

**W**HY DO people *misunderstand* the Bible? Once you understand what your attitude should be toward Bible study, and once you know the right method of studying, you can examine more closely why people often don't understand what the Bible says.

## Causes of Bible Difficulties

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" (*Scripture of Truth* by Collett, pages 115, 116).

*Carelessness* in reading the Bible and *ignorance* of what it says is also 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*" (*Helps to Bible Study*, by A. Sims, page 100).

## The Different 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 in 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. 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 practiced 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.*

We must consider when the act took place in a man's life before making a proper evaluation of his character. Jacob and David practiced polygamy *before their conversion* — but they repented of this and had only one wife after conversion (see the article, "Here's the Plain Truth About Old Testament Polygamy" in the October, 1963 PLAIN TRUTH, page 13).

## 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, uninspired 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 2:17 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, 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, 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.

Ask yourself: "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 with *words*. It suggests ideas to the mind of the one

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" (*Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* by John W. Haley, pages 6 and 7).

You 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

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 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 short-

er 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 Sidney 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 *absolutely correct*" (*Scripture of Truth*, page 140).

You will notice that 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.

Realize that 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 and the other uses the civil 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. 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.*

### 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. 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.

The Bible is not a scientific textbook. Though it 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.

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 stopped rotating. But to the observer on earth the "sun stood still."

Much of the Bible is written in the form of poetry or in language that is descriptive or figurative. As an example, notice the description of a thunderstorm in Psalm 18. In Psalm 42:9, David describes God as a rock and in Psalm 91:4 speaks of His wings and feathers. There would be no end of such "absurdities" if you were to interpret such passages in a literalistic and matter-of-fact way. You can know when a scripture is speaking in a figurative language if you are *honest* and use *common sense* when studying it.

Writers will also express things in different ways. 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.

### Errors of Copyists and Translators

Some difficulties in the Bible may be due to errors made by men who copied the manuscripts or by those who translated the original Hebrew and Greek into English. You need to realize that the original manuscripts of the books that compose the Bible no longer exist. The original manuscripts were copied many times and though they were copied with great care and exactness, some minor errors crept into the copies that were made. But through careful study, we can know what the original text was. There is not one important doctrine that depends on any doubtful reading of the text.

The errors due to copyists are trivial for all practical purposes. They usually are in relation to numbers and the

spelling of names — technical points that have no bearing on salvation and the purpose of life. Errors in figures would be easy to make, especially since Hebrew figures are made by using letters of the alphabet — letters that appear very much alike in many cases. As an example, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet represents the number one. With two little points above it no larger than flyspecks, the number becomes a thousand. A copyist need only to make a very slight error to make a great change in figures.

"Although it is certain that the words were often spelled out, the fact that signs were often, though not universally used, would be enough to account for all the discrepancies in numbers found in the Old Testament" (*Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, page 457).

### Errors in Translation

More serious are the errors of the translators — the men who translated the Hebrew and Greek texts into English. In some cases, the English translation gives a *wrong meaning* to the words or expressions of the original Hebrew or Greek.

One such glaring error is in Matthew 12:40 where we read that Jonah was swallowed by a "whale." Perhaps there are types of whales that can swallow a man, but, in any case, this is not an accurate translation. The original Greek word means "great sea monster." Christ was referring to Jonah 1:17 which says it was a "great fish" that swallowed Jonah.

Discrepancies may frequently appear in the King James Version when none actually exist in the original text. This is because the translators have used the same English word to represent several Hebrew or Greek terms.

For example, Luke 13:24 would appear to contradict II Timothy 2:24 because of how the word "strive" is used. Different Greek words are used, but translated the same. The term in Luke should have been translated "agonize."

Other principles that will help you solve Bible difficulties will be given in the next installment. Don't miss it.

# HOW TO SOLVE BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

*Here are more principles that will help you solve Bible difficulties — how to determine original word meanings — how to use marginal comments and footnotes — and other basic guidelines to help you better understand God's Word.*

**W**ORDS 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.

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.

## 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, 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 you 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. Check all such *obscure scriptures* in a modern translation to help you clearly understand.

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 originally meant *to precede or go before*, but now means *to hinder*. See I Thessalonians 4:15 which should be corrected into *today's* English: "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 Co-

rinthians. This word meant *love* in 1611 A.D. It comes from the old French word *charitet* which meant *dearness*. This *dearness* 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 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.

Regarding the changes of Greek usage made by man, Bullinger says, "The Greek language was in use some four centuries before Christ, and had a wonderful literature. 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" (*How to Enjoy the Bible* by E. W. Bullinger, page 235).

This is why lexicons may *not* have the correct meaning of a word if their 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 mostly to the first and second centuries before and after Christ. They have been a great help in finding 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* 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 scribes prayed, they did it to be seen of men. When men had seen them, therefore, they were given their *receipt in full*. There was nothing more for them to receive. They could expect no real answer to their prayers. The word "reward" does *not* convey this more accurate sense of the Greek word.

The *papyri* have also given added meaning to 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*" (*How to Enjoy the Bible* by Bullinger, page 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 With More Than One Meaning

The Bible uses many Greek words in different connections and with various meanings. *Different words* in the origi-

nal Greek (and in Hebrew as well) are often rendered by the *same word* in English where it was thought important to have variety.

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, you can see at a glance, under the English word, the Greek word from which it is translated. The index will tell you whether the word is translated otherwise elsewhere — and if so, under what renderings you can find them.

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 you have all the information before you, you will soon discover whether the usage is uniform or whether there is more than one sense in which the word is used.

This type of study requires a spiritual understanding (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 you have learned in the past and 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 means: "a coming which *includes* the idea of a permanent dwelling *from that coming onwards*" (*A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* by Bullinger).

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. You can substitute the word "presence" for the word "coming" in the following scriptures: Mat. 24:22-27; I Thes. 4:15 and II Peter 3:10-12.

You will notice that all these scriptures show that the coming or presence of God and Jesus Christ will be accom-

panied 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. 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 you were to make a study of the word "temptation" in the Bible, you will find that it has been translated from two different Greek words — *peirazo* and *peirasmos*. You will particularly notice 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 you 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* and specifically 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 over-



come 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 you need to be constantly led into trials? Can you learn to obey God without Him bringing some trial upon you to help you grow as you should? You should pray that God would give you the strength to obey Him without having difficult trials come upon you. So, pray that God will not have to lead you into TRIALS. If you obey Him and live by His laws, this will not be necessary. But whatever God does will be for your 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. 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."

### Marginal Renderings and Footnotes

All good Bibles have marginal notes or a center reference column. This can be a very useful and valuable aid to the Bible student. This column contains different renderings of words and phrases that are either the literal translation of the Hebrew or Greek where the English idiom requires a different form of expression, or are alternative translations in doubtful cases. In most cases the meaning will not vary to any great extent. But in some cases the marginal rendering will clarify a scripture without having to check a concordance or lexicon.

One example is found in Hebrews 2:14 which some use to prove that

Satan the devil will be destroyed. The word "destroy," however, is in question. One Oxford edition of the King James Version uses numbers by words in the text to denote renderings given in the center reference column.

By the word "destroy" is the number 5. When we find the number 5 in the center reference column, we see a note which says, "Or *annul*." In other words, the Greek word translated "destroy" in Hebrews 2:14 could also be translated "annul." It could also be translated, as it is in other places, "make of no effect," or "make void."

Christ will annul Satan's power, make him of no effect. Satan will be made *powerless*, all his power and authority stripped from him by Jesus Christ at His return. This verse in Hebrews 2:14 does *not* teach that Satan will be *literally destroyed* (see the article, "Satan's Fate").

The center reference column also gives references of Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament. Various editions of the Bible, of course, will differ as to what material is given in the center column.

Use these Bible helps to answer your Bible questions and solve the problems you come across in your study. Another helpful book is, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* by Haley. Over 900 solutions are given for so-called contradictions and discrepancies.

When studying the Bible, follow the basic rules given in the reprint article, "Twelve Rules for Bible Study," available on request. In addition, here are several more principles that will help you solve Bible difficulties.

### What is the Literal Meaning?

Find out the most exact and LITERAL meaning of the original text. Acts 12:4 mentions the word "Easter," but is that the exact meaning of the original Greek? No! The original

Greek word is *pascha* and is translated as "passover" in every other place it is used in the New Testament.

Another example is in Luke 17:21 which some people take to mean that God's kingdom is set up in our hearts. First of all, they don't realize that Christ was talking to the *Pharisees*. Is the kingdom of God "within" the Pharisees? Of course not. The marginal rendering is, "in the midst of you." The representative of God's coming Kingdom, Jesus Christ, was right there *among* the Pharisees — not *in* them.

False teachers use Revelation 20:10 to prove that people are tormented in an ever-burning hellfire. But any word in the King James Version that is written in italics is *not* in the original text. Italicized words have been supplied by the translators to clarify the meaning in English. In some cases, however, the meaning has been perverted.

Notice that the word "are" in Revelation 20:10 is in italics. The correct word should be "were" or "were cast." The devil will be cast into the lake of fire "where the beast and the false prophet *were cast*, and [the devil] shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

### Is the Language Figurative or Symbolic?

Scriptures written in figurative or symbolic language are not to be taken literally. In Psalm 42:9, David describes God as a rock and in Psalm 91:4 speaks of His wings and feathers. These descriptions are not to be understood as literally being that way. The spiritual attributes of God are compared to physical objects so that we, as human beings, can comprehend spiritual beings.

Prophecies often use symbols. Always remember that *the Bible interprets its own symbols*. The book of Revelation is filled with symbolic language. Mr. Armstrong's booklets about this book of Revelation show how these symbols are explained — either in the book itself or elsewhere in the Bible.

Note the exact force and precise meaning of each word used. The wrong idea that Peter was the first pope and built the Christian church is due to not applying this rule. In Matthew 16:18,

Christ said to Peter, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church." Did Christ mean that the Church was to be built upon Peter?

The Greek word used for "Peter" is *petros* which means a pebble or small stone. But for "rock" the Greek word is *petra* — a large rock or boulder. The Church was to be built on the Rock — *petra* — not on a pebble. Christ is the Rock (I Cor. 10:4) and the "chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

The precise meaning of words can be important in understanding other scriptures. Notice that II Corinthians 3:7 is telling 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, "Is Obedience to God Required for Salvation?").

### 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.

The prophet Isaiah frequently uses the expression, "in that day." Whenever he says this, he means the "day of the Lord" — *the latter days* just before Christ returns (Isa. 2:2, 11-12).

### Study Plain Scriptures First

*Begin with the plainer scriptures*

*and reserve the more obscure ones until you have more knowledge.* Realize that some scriptures, if taken by themselves and out of context, can be made to say more than one thing. This is why it is important to study *all* the scriptures on any one subject to get at the truth. In such a study, begin with the plain and clear scriptures first.

When studying the subject of the law and Ten Commandments, keep these clear and plain scriptures in mind: I John. 3:4; 2:4; 5:2-3; Mat. 5:17; 19:17. These scriptures *cannot* be twisted to say that God's Law and His Commandments are abolished and no longer need to be obeyed.

If heaven and hell is the subject, begin with such scriptures as John 3:13 and Acts 2:34 before trying to understand John 14:2 and Luke 16. About the soul, Genesis 2:7, Psalm 146:4 and Ecclesiastes 9:5 are clear and plain. Matthew 10:28, on the other hand, is vague and obscure. Any such scripture must be understood in the light of the plainer ones.

*Any passage in the Bible should be understood as those who were addressed would have understood it.* When 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?* 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." 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.

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.

*Consider the opinions the writer opposed when reading what he wrote.* 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 (see the article, "Does it Matter Which Days We Should Observe?").

Use these rules in your study of the Bible. Study the Bible with the intention of finding out what every word means. Study it for *wisdom* and let it guide your daily life. And study it for *correction*, letting it help you grow closer to God.

Bible study shouldn't be a drudgery. It should be something you *love* to do. It should be *enjoyable*, exhilarating and satisfying. *Make Bible study a very important part of your life!*