
HINTS FOR UNDERSTANDING “DIFFICULT” BIBLE PASSAGES

By Daniel A. Brown, PhD

All of us have encountered verses and statements in the Bible that confuse or alarm us because they seem to be saying something that sounds so unlike the Lord, so different than how we have experienced Him in our personal life. When that happens, what can we do to at least begin to look at those passages from a more helpful perspective?

Here are a few suggestions for better understanding the Bible:

- Relax in the assurance that what you do not understand now, you will understand in the future. Don’t get “stuck” on something that you do not fully understand. Just keep reading, and focus on verses that make obvious sense to you today.
- Read the Bible in light of God’s goodness, kindness and graciousness. Any understanding that paints God in a different light is an incomplete or an inaccurate interpretation.
- Everything in the Scriptures, if understood correctly, will “build you up”—encouraging and strengthening you—and add to your awareness of all the spiritual resources and provisions the Lord gives as your inheritance (ACTS 20:32).

- Be sure to read the passage in its full context—looking at what has happened before, and what transpires afterwards—those bookends explain a lot.
- Be careful to catch all the details of the text; what the Bible actually does and does not say is often quite different from what we infer or imagine it says.
- Look at the cross-references; they will take you to similar or parallel passages elsewhere in the Bible. The whole Bible is the best lens through which to look at any portion of the whole.
- Get the literal story firmly in your mind before you start drawing conclusions or trying to generalize from a single episode. What happened in one historic situation does not necessarily imply anything about future situations.
- Maintain a posture of humility. There may be things that you cannot understand about what God does/says; His plans and activities are often too deep or too high for us to grasp with our limited human brain (PSALM 92:5; ISAIAH 55:8-9). Count on the fact that God knows more, loves more and does more that we could ever fully realize.

In addition to these specific suggestions, it is hugely helpful to simply pray, asking Jesus to give you the understanding and awareness you need for your walk with Him today. As obvious as it sounds, remember that we cannot learn/know everything at once, right away. We *grow* in our spiritual understanding; a steady diet of Bible reading will absolutely guarantee that you will digest all the spiritual nutrients you need for a healthy life.

Lastly, train your heart to echo David’s prayer, as he was trying to understand spiritual matters:

“Make me know Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; lead me in Your truth and teach me for You are the God of my salvation.” PSALM 25:4-5