

How to Study Difficult Verses



SABBATH—JUNE 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Timothy 2:10–15; 1 Chronicles 29:17; James 4:6–10; Galatians 6:9; Acts 17:11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Remember that we are saved because our Lord is patient. Our dear brother Paul told you the same thing when he wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. Paul writes about this in all his letters. Sometimes there are things in Paul’s letters that are hard to understand. And some people explain these things falsely [in the wrong way]. They are ignorant [have no understanding] and weak in faith. They also falsely explain the other Scriptures. But they are destroying themselves [their own spirits] by doing that” (2 Peter 3:15, 16, ICB).

PETER SAYS that some parts of Paul’s letters are “hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16, NKJV). Do you see that Peter does not say that all parts of Paul’s letters are hard to understand? Only some are. We know that also is true about the Bible. Who has not read a verse that was strange and difficult to understand? For sure, we all have this experience sometimes.

This week we will look at the reasons why some verses are difficult to understand. We also will answer the question: What can we do to understand these verses better? In the end, some of our questions may not be answered before Jesus comes back. At the same time, we must remember that most verses in the Bible are not hard to understand. So, we should not let the small number of difficult verses cause our trust in the Bible to become weak. Remember, we can trust the Bible because it is God’s Word.



Peter says that some parts of Paul’s letters are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR WHAT LOOK LIKE DISAGREEMENTS IN THE BIBLE (2 Timothy 2:10–15)

Read Paul’s advice in 2 Timothy 2:10–15. Paul tells Timothy to “do your best” (2 Timothy 2:15, ERV) and to “teach the message of truth correctly” (2 Timothy 2:15, NlrV). What important message does Paul give us here?

All thoughtful and honest Bible students will agree that there are parts in the Bible that are hard to understand. This problem should not worry us. We should expect it. Remember, we are not perfect. We do not live forever or have perfect knowledge. No human knows all there is to know about anything on earth. We know even less about the things of God. So, when we humans try to understand the wisdom of God in the Bible, we will have trouble sometimes. But we must remember that this does not in any way prove that the Bible is not true.

People who do not believe that God gave humans the Bible often say that there are many parts of the Bible that disagree. For them, the Bible is only a book written by humans. So, they believe the Bible must be filled with mistakes. They do not try to look for an explanation that shows that there is agreement between the difficult parts. People who start to question the first pages of the Bible may soon doubt much of the rest of the Bible too.

So, why do some parts of the Bible disagree with other parts? The problem may come from mistakes that people made when they made copies of the Bible or wrote it in another language. Ellen G. White writes: “Some say to us, ‘Do you not think that the people who copied the Bible or wrote in another language made mistakes?’ This is possible. Some people will stop believing in the Bible because of these mistakes. These same people will be ready to find problems with believing in the mysteries of the Bible. Why? Because their weak minds do not understand God’s plan. These same people will have trouble understanding plain facts that most minds will accept. They will not be able to understand spiritual truths or see that God’s words are clear and beautiful. True believers in the Bible will never see problems with the truth that God has clearly shown.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, page 16, adapted.



Some mistakes in the Bible came from people who made copies of the Bible or wrote it in another language.

Why is it so important that we study the Bible with hearts that are not filled with pride?

BE HONEST AND CAREFUL WHEN YOU STUDY (1 Chronicles 29:17)

Have you ever read a verse that you did not understand? Was it hard to see how this verse connected or fit with other verses? It is hard to believe that anyone has not had this problem. The question is, How did you solve it? Or, more important, How **should** you solve it?

Read 1 Chronicles 29:17; Proverbs 2:7; and 1 Timothy 4:16. What are these verses saying? How can they help us to know what to do when we read a verse that is hard to understand?

We must be honest. Being honest will help us to solve problems in the right way. Being honest keeps us safe too. It helps us not to avoid problems or try to hide them. Being honest will keep us from giving silly answers to the problems. God is pleased with us when we are honest. So, we should copy His example in everything we do, even when we study the Bible.

Honest people will be careful not to say anything about a Bible verse that is not true. They will not lie or lead others to believe anything false. It is far better to wait for God to give you an answer that the Bible supports. We must not try to explain things in a way that is not true and clear. When we are honest in our Bible study, we build trust in God and with other people. All healthy friendships are built on trust. So, do not make a verse say what you want it to say when it does not say that at all. It is much better to tell someone that you do not know the answer to a question.

Careful people want to know the truth about the Bible. So, they always will make sure that they do not rush to get answers that come from quick decisions about what the verse means. They also do not try to answer questions about things that they know very little about. They do not use proof that is weak to show someone that their idea is correct. Careful people always pay attention to every piece of information or part of a verse that may be important. They take their time to think about things. They do not rush. They are careful in their study of the Bible.

What do you do with verses that you do not fully understand? What should you do with them when they do not fit what you know about Bible truth?



Careful people take their time to think about things. They do not rush.

SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH NO PRIDE IN YOUR HEART (James 4:6–10)

Read James 4:6–10; 2 Chronicles 7:14; and Zephaniah 3:12. Why is having a heart with no pride important when we study difficult verses in the Bible?

Many people come to understand that they must depend on something and someone else. They learn that they do not have all the answers to life's problems. These people learn that Bible truth is more important than their need to be right. They understand that the truth is not what they say is right. Maybe the most important truth that these people learn is just how little they really know about truth. They know that they "see as if [they] are looking into a dark mirror" (1 Corinthians 13:12, ICB).

God will bless us when we have hearts and minds with no pride. This is what it means to have a humble heart. When we study with a humble heart, then we will grow in knowledge. A humble heart helps us to be free from pride. Then we will be willing to let God teach us. Does this mean that humble people are not ever wrong? Of course not. They may be wrong at times. Or they may change their minds about things. Their having a humble heart shows only that they surrender their hearts to Bible truth. They understand that they do not know everything. So, they know that they can always learn new things about the Bible.

"All who come to the Bible for truth must come with humble hearts and minds. They must want to know the truth about God's plan to save them. Then they will understand what the Bible says. But there are people who study the Bible with a spirit that the Bible does not accept. These people will search the Bible and come away with false ideas. The Lord will not talk to a mind that does not care about the truth. God does not waste His teachings on a person who shows Him no respect and whose mind is not clean. But Satan teaches every mind that surrenders itself to his lies. These people are willing to say that God's holy law is not important.

"We need to empty our hearts of all pride. With true and holy hearts, we need to search the Bible. Only a person with a humble heart that is sorry for sin can understand Bible truth."—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 22, 1907, adapted.



Satan teaches every mind that surrenders itself to his lies.

BE PATIENT AND DO NOT GIVE UP! (Galatians 6:9)

Read Galatians 6:9. In this verse, Paul says that we must not get tired of doing good. In the same way, we must not get tired of answering difficult questions. Why are being patient and not giving up important when we solve problems?

Real success always comes from not giving up. If we do not need to work hard to get something, then we may not care too much about it. The difficult verses in the Bible give us a chance to put our brains to work. The energy and time we put into solving a problem shows how important the answer is to us. Any time that we spend studying the Bible to try to find out more about its meaning and message is time well spent. When we carefully search the Bible for answers, it is a blessing. Even if it takes a long time. Maybe it is even more of a blessing than when we find the answer right away. When we solve a hard problem, the answer is very precious to us.

You may not solve a problem right away. But that does not prove that you cannot solve it. It is surprising how often we forget this. There are many people who read a difficult verse in the Bible. They do not understand it right away. So, they feel that this problem cannot be solved. Then they think the Bible cannot be trusted. But we must remember that there may be an easy answer. We may not be able to see it. What do we think about a math student who tries to solve a difficult math problem and gives up after only a half hour? Then this student says that there is no possible answer to the problem. Why? Because he did not solve it! We must not behave this way when we study the Bible.

When you read something difficult that you cannot solve, what should you do? Lay the problem aside for a while. Then obey the clear Bible truth that God has shown to you. We get some spiritual answers only after we have been willing to follow what God already has told us to do. So be patient. Do not give up in your study of the Bible. Remember, believers in the end times are patient (Revelation 14:12).

What can we learn from other people who have been patient in their study of difficult Bible verses? How can we encourage other people not to give up their search for truth?



Do not give up in your study of the Bible. Remember, believers in the end times are patient (Revelation 14:12).

**PRAY WHEN YOU STUDY DIFFICULT BIBLE VERSES
(Acts 17:11)**

Read Acts 17:11; Acts 8:35; and Acts 15:15, 16. What did the apostles, or leaders and teachers, and church members in New Testament times do when they had to solve difficult problems? Why does the Bible always offer us the best explanations for its verses?



When we pray, we show God that we want His Spirit to help us understand.

The best answer to Bible problems is always found in the Bible itself. So, it is best when we study Bible problems to look for answers in the whole Bible. That is much better than trying to understand a verse by itself. We must use the whole Bible to help us to understand the Bible. That is one of the most important things we can do.

Let us say you do not understand a Bible verse. What should you do? Try to search for an answer from other verses that talk about the same topic. Always try to find clear words from the Bible that help you to understand those verses that are less clear. Also, do not use science or human thinking or other writings to explain the Bible's meaning. We should let the verses of the Bible show us what they mean.

We must remember to pray when we study the Bible too. On our knees, we look at problems in a new way. When we pray, we show God that we are in need of His help to understand the Bible. When we pray, we show God that we want His Spirit to help us to understand. This is the same Holy Spirit who led the Bible writers to write the Bible.

When we pray, we see what is in our hearts. We can tell God why we want to understand what we read. In prayer, we ask God to open our eyes to the Bible and to give us a willing spirit to obey His truth. (This is super important!) God guides us by His Holy Spirit in answer to our prayers. He does not ever go against what He says in the Bible. God always will agree with the Bible. He will build on the truth that He led Bible writers to communicate to us.

How does prayer help you get into the right spirit so that you can better understand and obey the Bible?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “What to Do With Doubt” pages 105–113 in *Steps to Christ*.

We find many mysteries in the Bible. These mysteries are difficult for our human minds to understand. We cannot fully explain them. This is why we need a heart with no pride, or a humble mind. We should be willing to learn from the Bible. When we trust what the Bible says, then we allow the Bible to say what it means. We must respect the Bible, not change it or turn away from its true meaning. (Yes, some people really do change Bible verses to make them say what they want them to say.)

“When we open the Bible without respect or prayer, doubt grows in our minds. The same thing happens when our thoughts and feelings are not fixed on God and are not in agreement with His plan for our lives. When that happens, doubt will grow when we study the Bible. Then the enemy takes control of our thoughts. He gives us explanations about the Bible that are wrong. So, that is why men must try to be in agreement with God in all that they say and do. If not, it is possible that they will be wrong in their understanding of the Bible. It is not safe to trust their explanations. It does not matter how smart they are. People who look for mistakes in the Bible do not have spiritual wisdom. Their views are wrong. They will see many reasons for doubt and for not believing in things that are really plain and simple.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 110, 111, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Why are the things we talked about this week so important to our having a good understanding of the Bible? What else do you feel is important to have in helping you to understand the Bible better?
- 2 Why should we not be surprised to find things in the Bible that are hard to explain and understand? Think about all the things in nature that are, at times, hard to understand. To this day, water is filled with mysteries. Water! So, why should it be any different with the Bible?
- 3 In Luke 23:43, most Bible versions show Jesus telling the thief on the cross that he will be in heaven with Jesus that day. How can we explain this difficult verse? How can John 20:17; Ecclesiastes 9:5; and 1 Corinthians 15:16–20 help us to understand the answer to this question?



The enemy gives us explanations about the Bible that are wrong when we have doubt in our hearts.