

Can We Understand the Bible?

(Part 3)

by Bryan Gibson

Here is quick review of the points made in the two previous articles: 1) Jesus says we can understand the Scriptures, so let's not call Him a liar. 2) God has both the desire and the ability to make His word understandable, so let's not question either one. 3) God's word has great power to accomplish many things; let's not try to nullify its power by saying that we can't understand it.

Granted, there are some very difficult passages in the Bible, a fact that even the Bible's writers acknowledge. On the writings of Paul, Peter said: "...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 3:16). Notice, first, that it says **hard** to understand, not **impossible**. Secondly, there is no indication given that because these passages are hard to understand, we can each have "our own interpretation." The passage even condemns those who "twist" (or distort) the true meaning of these passages. There is a way to make these hard passages easier—"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" (2 Peter 3:18). The more we study, the more we're able to handle both the "milk" and the "meat" (Hebrews 5:11-14).

But why would God make some passages hard to understand? Why not make it where we can all understand, with the least amount of effort? The word of God, written the way it is, has a way of separating those who love the truth from those who don't (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12), the humble from the proud (Matthew 11:25), the honest from the deceitful (2 Peter 3:16), the diligent from the lazy (2 Timothy 2:15). Proper understanding is reserved for those who want it very badly (Proverbs 2:1-5).

Here's a point that may surprise you. Certain things in the Bible will never be understood. But isn't the whole point of these articles that we **can** understand the Bible? That's right, and we're not wavering from that conviction. We're not referring to those things that reveal God's **will** to us. We're talking about those things that are **incidental** to the main message. We don't know the identity of Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), but the main point of that passage is very clear. We may not know the meaning of all the symbols in the Book of Revelation, but we can understand God's will for us in that book. There is a big difference between understanding the **will** of God (Ephesians 5:17) and understanding **every word** in the Bible.

If the will of God can be understood, why then do we have so much division in the religious world? Why so many conflicting doctrines, so many different plans of salvation? Is the Bible to blame? We believe it's a "people problem," not a Bible problem. We'll explore that more in part four, which will be the last lesson in this series.