

IF THE BIBLE IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND – REJOICE!

D. Requirements for this Study

D2. Prerequisite: Readiness of Mind

When those following Jesus heard him say “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you”ⁱ, several of them were not prepared to hear this. So, they responded, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”ⁱⁱ. Jesus questioned their expectations by asking, “Does this offend you?”ⁱⁱⁱ. By their actions, their minds are made known to us: “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more”^{iv}. Though the other disciples were perplexed by his teaching, they at least showed a willingness to keep following Jesus by their response, “Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹”Also *we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*”^v. This is a powerful object lesson from John chapter 6, in which we observe those disciples display to us a ‘readiness of mind’. Seeing as, the disciples who stayed were faced with a decision whether or not to set aside their preconceptions of what they *thought* following Jesus would entail. Despite their uncertainty of the meaning of his words, they continued to trust in the Lord to lead them.

The disciples resolved to follow Jesus, not because they understood every word he said, but because they knew who he was! They based their trust in him, upon the Lord’s character, and not on their ability to comprehend. So should we, also, trust in God’s character, in who He is, regardless of our level of understanding

ⁱ [JOHN 6:53]

ⁱⁱ [JOHN 6:60]

ⁱⁱⁱ [JOHN 6:61]

^{iv} [JOHN 6:66]

^v [JOHN 6:68-69]

of His word. For, understanding the word of God takes time and illumination by the author – the Holy Spirit. If we examine the apostle Paul’s life, we find that he spent three years from the time of his transformation until he began his ministry^{vi}. The twelve apostles had also spent three years with the Lord, getting to know Him. Yet, even after those three years, they had more to learn, as evident in this account in John 14:7-9,

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." ⁹Jesus said to him, "*Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?*"

Peter admits that there are certain things in the Scriptures that are hard to understand. He warns us not to take such misunderstandings lightly. For, the consequences are destructive. He writes this in 2 Peter 3:15-16,

“consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of *these things, 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.”

We should not try to avoid these difficult topics, either. Prophecy and the study of the end times, known as eschatology, are two such topics looked on by many with trepidation, and are neglected far too often as a result.

Studying the Book of Revelation, then, can be a daunting task to some due to its primary focus on the end times. The mature believer may have an even greater aversion to Revelation, usually because they come to the study of it with preconceived notions of the truth. However, believing that we already have the answers, we are likely not asking the questions that would actually lead to a better understanding. Further, a flawed human trait we all share is the tendency to focus

^{vi} GAL 1:15-18, when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

on the parts of Scripture that suit our way of thinking, and disregard those passages that fail to match up to our preconceived view. Our biggest obstacle to learning the truth, then, is thinking that we already know it! Pride can blind even the best of students from admitting when we stubbornly maintain erroneous thinking^{vii}, known as a fallacy. So, from where do these fallacies come? Jesus told us to be watchful of such misleading deceptions^{viii}, and Paul even warned us not to fall prey to the doctrines of demons^{ix}! John foretold of those within the church who would turn against the faith^x, who were never true believers, but are hostile to the truth^{xi}. Jude also warned us to be guarded against those who would strive to divide us^{xii}. Indeed, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers^{xiii} behind these impostors of the faith^{xiv}. The adversary has set up his ministers of falsehood^{xv} to spread their deviously subtle and cunning deceptions.

So, rather than disregard any part of Scripture that is hard to understand or adopt a fallacy as doctrine, we should come to the Father as little children. We should trust in His character, in the Lord's promise to guide us, and to teach us all truth by His Spirit. Just as the disciples who were not familiar with Jesus' teaching of the Lord's supper, so we may not be familiar with certain things found in Revelation. But, whenever we come to a passage in the Bible that we find hard to

^{vii} 2PET 3:17-18, You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, *beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked*; ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

^{viii} MATH 24:11-13, Then *many false prophets will rise up and deceive many*. ¹²"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³"But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

^{ix} 1TIM 4:1-3, the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving *heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

^x 1JON 2:18-19, Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, *even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour*. ¹⁹*They went out from us, but they were not of us*; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

^{xi} 1JON 2:22-23, Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? *He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son*. ²³Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

^{xii} JUDE 1:18-19, they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. ¹⁹*These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit*.

^{xiii} EPH 6:12, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but *against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age*, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

^{xiv} ACTS 20:28-29, I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰*Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things*, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

^{xv} 2COR 11:13-15, such are *false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ*. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

understand, we should rejoice! For, such a quandary gives us an opportunity to grow in our faith by trusting in the Lord to explain it to us. Much of our delight in the Lord^{xvi} is then watching how the Holy Spirit makes clear what had previously confounded us. For, we must bring our questions to the Holy Spirit, trusting in His promise to teach us all things. As Jesus made clear in John 14:26,

“the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, *He will teach you all things*, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

We may remember Peter as one of the disciples who stayed with Jesus though he did not understand everything the Lord had said. This was clearly evident many times when Jesus would rebuke Peter for his careless words. The most infamous of these episodes we find in Matthew 16:21-23,

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. ²²Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "*Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!*" ²³But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Not understanding the Scriptures that foretold of the Lord’s execution^{xvii}, Peter demonstrated perilous ignorance by his words. Thankfully, by Peter’s example, we can realize that we are not alone in our times of uncertainty of God’s word.

As promised, the Holy Spirit brought to Peter comprehension of all that had taken place and brought back to his mind all the words of Jesus. So that, when Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, his words were no longer a disgrace, but powerful. He then addressed the crowd in Acts 2:14,

“Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, *let this be known to you, and heed my words.*”

^{xvi} PSM 37:23, The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And *He delights in his way*.

^{xvii} DAN 9:26, after the sixty-two weeks *Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself*; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Then, by giving an eloquent and commanding speech, Peter proved his grasp of the word of God, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter moved those in the audience to come to faith in the Lord, as we read in Acts 2:38-41,

“Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹"For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹Then *those who gladly received his word were baptized*; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

Peter should be an inspiration to all of us, because he began as we all do, unsure and unconfident in the word. Yet, Peter showed that by being predetermined to follow Jesus, with an eagerness to receive the word, that even we can come to a confidence of Scripture through study of the word and the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

We should strive to become mature in our faith. We should always move toward confidence in our knowledge of the word of God. Paul prays for the Roman church, and for us, regarding this very thing in Romans 15:13-14,

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁴Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, *filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*”

The second prerequisite of our study together in Revelation is then closely related to the first: as it is the readiness to accept the things in Scripture that we do not understand. We then trust in God’s character, the Lord’s promise, and power of the Holy Spirit to teach us all truth. Thereby, we may prove ourselves as noble as the Berean in Acts 17:10-11 [YLT],

“the brethren immediately, through the night, sent forth both Paul and Silas to Berea, who having come, went to the synagogue of the Jews; ¹¹and these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, *they received the word with all readiness of mind*, every day examining the Writings whether those things were so.”

We should replace any fear of understanding Revelation with an eagerness to see how God will, by various methods, teach each one of us, personally, His word. We need to test for fallacy by daily examination of the Scriptures to see if the things we learn are in agreement with all of God's counsel. And to see clearly, we must 'take God at His word', remembering that God says what He means, and means what He says.