

Bite Size Bible Study

Difficulties of Bible Study #211

By Pastor Lee

As we study our Bibles, whether it is one translation or many, we have a tendency towards thinking that there are errors in what we are studying. Truly some errors do creep into various translations. Translators are human and as such bring their own theology into their translation, even though most try very hard not to do that. But we have many translations to use today and the probability of a single error occurring across all these translations is very small.

Most of the errors occur because of the reader. Given that statement, maybe it would be better to call them difficulties.

The most prevalent error (difficulty) is when we take a segment of scripture out of context. When we try to study a segment of scripture and don't consider the context it was written in, we fail to appreciate references to statements that have previously been made and/or amplifying statements, that will follow outside of the segment we have segregated.

Another difficulty is when we fail to comprehend what the author was saying to his initial audience within his own cultural, political, and circumstantial time. We step into these inconsistencies when we don't take the time to find out all the facts.

We need to understand and accept that:

1. Our lack of understanding is not a Biblical Error.
2. An unresolved difficulty is not a Biblical Error.
3. Silence from scripture is not a Biblical Error.

There are many kinds of difficulties one encounters when we read the Bible. We need to be aware of these difficulties so we can answer with confidence when the questioning individual asks for our understanding. Let's look at the most prevalent six.

Faith Difficulties

We might question the accounts in Scripture are they true historical accounts or are they stories. If they are stories is the lesson put forth true or is it heresy. Here are some examples: Adam & Eve, Abel, Noah, the Flood, Red Sea, Jonah, walking on water, and the Resurrection. All of these, question our faith in what some consider the living Word of God. Jesus confirmed the accounts of some of these. But what about the Red Sea and God splitting the waters for the Israelites to pass through? Was it really the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds? Is the story historically and scientifically accurate or is the fact that God lead them and provided for them, the lesson we are to gain from this story? Myth or fiction can be just as spiritually enlightening as historical or scientific truth if we understand what the author is getting at.

It all boils down to how much faith we place in the stories and teachings of the Bible. We sometimes try to discredit what we don't understand. Just because we do not know "how" all the miracles in the Bible occurred does not mean they did not happen. We have to stop thinking of the Bible as a Biology or History Textbook and begin looking at it as teaching us a way of life – God's preferred way for us to live, the way He designed us to live.

Language Difficulties

Very few of us can read the Bible in the original language, let alone one of the secondary languages it was translated into. A figure of speech in one language can be totally misinterpreted in another language. We must rely on those who study the culture of ancient peoples to give us insight into their figurative language.

The Bible describes events as they appeared to be to the author of any single book. (Example – "*Sun rising and setting*"). To the author of Genesis, who knew nothing of the solar system, the movement of the sun across the sky made perfect sense. Because we have further understanding of the scientific knowledge of the solar system we know that the earth rotating causes the sun to appear to move across the sky. Figures of speech are not errors, they can be nothing more than a current understanding to explain a phenomenon. We may need to apply different understandings when we read ancient literature such as the Bible and be aware of figures of speech.

Scientific Difficulties

Some say the Bible is filled with primitive, pre-scientific views of the Universe. The Bible never claimed to be a science book, nor are we to read it in that context.

Factual Difficulties

Many difficulties in this area deal with statistics. (Example: one angel in Matthew 28:2 or two angels in John 20:12). Matthew said one angel spoke. That act does not eliminate two angels. One person may round off a number while the other may use an exact number. A closer study of the problem in this category, taking into account the author's reason for writing, the audience he was writing to, the point in history when it was composed, and the culture of that time, will always reveal a logical explanation.

Doctrinal Difficulties

This difficulty can be solved through the context of the verse. These are minor problems (Example: faith

(Paul) vs. works (James)). Both Paul and James quoted Genesis 15:6 to back up their points.

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6 NIV

Paul used the verse for the teaching of salvation (*Faith*). James used the verse for the teaching on your conduct after salvation (*Works*). These difficulties can be easily solved by examining the passage in its context and the Author's intention.

Ethical Difficulties

This is when we find two Scriptures seemingly espousing opposite moral and ethical standards. An example might be killing another person: "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:13) and "*Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death*" (Exodus 31:15).

These difficulties can be solved through careful study of the issues in their full context and meaning. Regardless of the kind of difficulty we find, there is an ethical explanation for our difficulty in understanding them. What appears as an "*irreconcilable error*" can often be found in the translation of the Scripture.

... from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:15b-17 NIV

When we have a close relationship with God, we will experience the guidance from the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Ha Kodish*) and if we listen to that "still small voice" we will be able to correctly understand the scriptures.

*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. **Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.**"* Luke 10:21 NIV

We need not be concerned with people asking questions about the scriptures as we will be given the best answer for the moment by the Holy Spirit.

"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." Luke 12:11-13 NIV

We can be sure of our understanding because the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." John 14:15-17 NIV

Reference:

<https://www.torahlifeministry.com/blog/item/201-sneak-peak-4-six-difficulties-of-the-bible.html>

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