

DEEPER

Daily Bible Study

2020, Quarter 2, Lesson 12

Dealing With Difficult Passages

This study guide contains additional materials to accompany the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for the second quarter of 2020, titled How to Interpret Scripture. This Deeper Daily Bible Study develops the broad theme of studying and interpreting the Bible into some areas not covered by the Sabbath School Study Guide. While the general topic of each week's set of lessons corresponds to the Study Guide topic for that week, the daily focus will vary at times from the that guide. We hope that you will find this approach to be a valuable added resource in your Bible study.

The "Digging Deeper" section probes into the day's topic, and illustrates the study principle or tool being discussed. Suggested answers, if included, are provided in parentheses. Sabbath School teachers will find this section especially helpful in the Sabbath School setting. The "Apply It" section gives the student an opportunity to apply the subject at hand to their own study of the Bible, and the "Share It" section provides an opportunity for those in group studies to discuss and share their response to the day's theme.

Sabbath (June 13, 2020): Dealing With Difficult Passages

Sometimes the Bible is hard to understand. Referring to Paul's writings, the apostle Peter wrote, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). In this week's lesson we will look at Biblical principles for dealing with Scripture's difficult passages.

Digging Deeper

- Read Matthew 7:24,25. What promise did Jesus give regarding the trustworthiness of placing our faith in the Bible? (Doing this is like building a house on a rock.) Within the context of this week's study, what might the "rain" and "floods" and "winds" represent in verse 25? (Doubts, suggestions, and questions regarding the authenticity and trustworthiness of the Bible.) What makes the difference in Jesus' parable between the person who builds on a rock and the one who builds on sand? (The person who builds on the rock not only hears, but does, the word of God.)

Some look to us gravely and say, "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth. {1SM 16.2}

- Read the statement below from Ellen White, written in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1888. Discuss how her advice compares to Christ's statement in Matthew 7:24.

Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost. The ingenuity of men has been exercised for ages to measure the Word of God by their finite minds and limited comprehension. If the Lord, the Author of the Living oracles, would throw back the curtain and reveal His wisdom and His glory before them, they would shrink into nothingness and exclaim as did Isaiah, 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips' (Isa. 6:5). [Ms 16, 1888; (1SM 15-18).] (Written at Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the autumn of 1888.)

Share It

- What do you find most confusing about the Bible right now? How are you looking for answers to this question?

Sunday (June 14, 2020): Possible Reasons for Apparent Contradictions

Given the size of the Bible, the passages with apparent contradictions are surprisingly few in number. While genuine questions can and do arise for even the most dedicated Christian and Bible student, many of the Bible's apparent contradictions arise for reasons that have more to do with us than with the Bible. In today's lesson we will look at a few of the things that can cause us to stumble in our reading and understanding of God's Word.

Digging Deeper

Read the following passages and discuss what problem each one addresses that can lead to misunderstandings of the Bible:

- Genesis 3:6 (Trusting to our own opinions and wisdom)

Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people. There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days. {ISM 15.2}

- John 7:17 (Refusal to obey what we do understand)

History shows that the problematic passages are not Christianity's most pressing problem. Instead, it is the failure of believers to accept the passages that are clearly understood. [Frank Hasel and Michael Hasel. *How to Interpret Scripture* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association), p. 115.]

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 (Lack of true conversion)

Those who work indifferently and half-heartedly will never succeed. Young and old should read the Word of God; and not only should they read it, but they should study it with diligent earnestness, praying, believing, and searching. Thus they will find the hidden treasure; for the Lord will quicken their understanding. {MYP 259.4}

Share It

- What things in the Bible used to be difficult for you to understand, that are now not so confusing? What has made the difference?

Monday (June 15, 2020): Dealing With Difficulties

In today's lesson we will look at several Biblical principles for dealing with confusing or troubling Bible passages. To begin with, however, here is an insightful statement from the church father Augustine of Hippo:

"If we are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, The author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood." [Augustine of Hippo, "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon" 11.5, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 4, *St. Augustin: The Writings Against the Manichaeon, and Against the Donatists* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 180.]

Digging Deeper

Read the following Bible passages and discuss how each one might apply to dealing with difficult passages:

- Psalm 19:12,13. (We are all prone to error, and also to extremes of opinion and belief. The first step in dealing with difficult passages is to ask God to reveal our own biases and weaknesses.)
- Isaiah 8:20. (While there is, of course, much we can learn about the world from a variety of sources and authors, when it comes to spiritual matters, we must choose our influences and teachers very carefully. Any author or teacher that does not teach the full truth of God's Word will eventually cause us to stumble in our understanding of Scripture.)
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. (Bible verses must be read and interpreted in context. Failure to do this will almost certainly result in a misunderstanding of Scripture.)
- John 9:24,25. (When faced with a difficult passage, start with truths and passages that are simple and clear.)

Share It

- What strategies have you found particularly helpful in dealing with difficult Bible passages?

Tuesday (June 16, 2020): How to Determine if a Doctrine is Biblical, Part 1

God's character is reflected in the teachings of His Word. As Ellen White made clear, the Bible and its doctrines are really an expression of the character of its Author:

This Holy Book has withstood the assaults of Satan, who has united with evil men to make everything of divine character shrouded in clouds and darkness. But the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven. {1SM 15.3}

In the next three lessons we will look at the connection between Bible doctrines and the character of God, and discover some useful keys for determining if a doctrine is Biblical or not.

The material in these three lessons is summarized in a free PDF titled "How to Determine if a Doctrine is Biblical" and is available at www.PathwayToParadise.org/pages/downloads.

Digging Deeper

Read the following Bible passages and discuss what each one reveals about the nature of God and His character:

1. 2 Chronicles 20:6 and Matthew 28:1 (God is King of the universe and has all authority)
2. John 1:1,14 and Colossians 2:8,9 (Jesus Christ is God in the flesh)
3. Matthew 3:13-17 and 1 John 5:7 (God testifies of Himself)

Apply It

The numbers below correspond to the numbers in the Digging Deeper section above. Read the verses below and discuss how each passage reveals a Scriptural test for doctrines that is related to God's character:

1. Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 4:4; John 12:44-50; Acts 17:11 (The test of Scriptural authority: Is Scripture used to support the doctrine? If not, reject it.)
2. 1 John 4:2,3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; John 5:39 (The test of confession: Does the doctrine deny Jesus Christ as the Son of God in the flesh? If so, reject it.)
3. Matthew 18:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 14:29; Isaiah 28:9,10 (The test of multiple witnesses: Is the doctrine supportable from the writings of at least two Bible authors? If not, reject it.)

Wednesday (June 17, 2020): How to Determine if a Doctrine is Biblical, Part 2

This lesson continues the comparison between the character of God and Bible doctrines.

Digging Deeper

Read the following Bible passages and discuss what each one reveals about the nature of God and His character:

1. Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 John 5:7 (God is One)
2. Malachi 3:6; James 1:17 (God never changes)
3. Exodus 34:4-7; Romans 2:5-11 (God is merciful and just)

Apply It

The numbers below correspond to the numbers in the Digging Deeper section above. Read the verses below and discuss how each passage reveals a Scriptural test for doctrines that is related to God's character:

1. 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 14:32; Matthew 4:4 (The test of internal unity: Do some passages of Scripture contradict the doctrine? If so, reject it.)
2. Psalm 33:11; 119:89; Matthew 5:17-19; Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18,19 (The test of immutability: Must Scripture be changed or abolished in order to support the doctrine? If so, reject it.)
3. Matthew 23:23,24; Luke 11:42; James 2:17,24; John 7:17 (The test of balance: Does the doctrine minimize the law, judgment, mercy, faith, or the love of God? If so, reject it.)

Thursday (June 18, 2020): How to Determine if a Doctrine is Biblical, Part 3

This lesson continues the comparison between the character of God and Bible doctrines.

Digging Deeper

Read the following Bible passages and discuss what each one reveals about the nature of God and His character:

1. Matthew 26:55; John 18:19-21; Romans 1:18-20 (God speaks clearly)
2. Exodus 15:11; Revelation 4:8; James 1:17 (God is holy)
3. Psalm 86:5; 1 John 4:8 (God is love)

Apply It

The numbers below correspond to the numbers in the Digging Deeper section above. Read the verses below and discuss how each passage reveals a Scriptural test for doctrines that is related to God's character:

1. John 2:19-21; Luke 24:27; Acts 3:18 (The test of clarity: Is the doctrine supported contextually and in the weight of Biblical evidence? If not, reject it.)
2. Matthew 23:25-28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:24 (The test of purity: Does the doctrine minimize the importance of inner cleansing from sin? If so, reject it.)
3. Galatians 5:22; Matthew 7:16,20 (The test of fruit: Does belief in and practice of the doctrine demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit? If not, reject it.)

Friday (June 19, 2020): What to Do With Doubt

We all have times of doubt, especially when it comes to understanding the deep things and purposes of God. In today's lesson we will look at some Bible verses that can help us navigate these times of questioning and uncertainty.

Digging Deeper

- Read Job 11:7-8 and Romans 11:33. What effect should the fact that God is infinite, and we are not, have on us? In what ways have you been reminded of this lately?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:12. Although some things remain unclear to us in this world, the Bible promises that someday everything will be understood. What does this promise mean to you, and why?
- Read Deuteronomy 29:29. For what reasons might God see best to keep some things hidden from us? According to this verse, for what reason does God reveal what He does to us?

Apply It

- Read Isaiah 1:18. What does this verse tell you about the kind of relationship God wants with us? What does this reveal about God's character?
- Read Psalm 34:8. What does it mean to "taste and see" that the Lord is good? Does it appear that God wants us to have a blind faith, or a "proven" faith?
- Read Proverbs 4:18. What will our experience be with God and the Bible the longer we seek the truth?

Share It

Although God will in some ways always remain mysterious to us, what about Himself has God revealed to you recently? What impact has this had on your life?