

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

(Nehemiah 8:1-12)

All those who *could* understand (3) listened with understanding (2) as the preacher caused them to understand (8), and the result was that they understood (12). Many in the man-made churches say that “It is impossible that we could all understand the Bible alike.” Recently it has been a growing doctrine among some in the church that “You understand the Bible only because the Holy Spirit acts on you in some way so you can”

The 119th Psalm, an alphabetic acrostic about the Bible and the benefits of applying it to one’s life, addresses this question several times. Verses 99-100 declare that man understands because he reads the Bible and keeps its established truths: *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.* Further, we are assured that we get understanding through reading the Bible: *Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way* (104), and *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple* (130). If we are to believe the Bible at all, it is simply incorrect to affirm that we cannot understand it.

Part of the purpose of the book of Proverbs is “to understand” (1:6). Among the many statements of wisdom in the book is the promise from God that the reader who wants to understand, and works at understanding, *shall* understand (2:1-9). Chapter 4, verses 1-7 repeat that understanding has to be wanted and “attended to,” but promises that, with these, understanding is available .

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Jesus (Matt. 13:14) and Paul (Acts 28:26-27) both made reference to this promise of Isaiah 6:9-10 that many will not believe the gospel because they will not try to understand it. The Bible is a lie, or it is understandable, for it declares again in the words of Isaiah (29:24), “They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.” And Isaiah isn’t the only prophet with such certainty, for the angel Gabriel told Daniel to understand the vision of weeks (Daniel 9:23).

In the New Testament also we are assured again and again that we can – and are admonished that we must – understand the word of God. Jesus, who certainly ought to know whether God made His word understandable to the mind of man, told men to “hear and understand” (Matt. 15:10). He asked commonly educated men, who obviously were not aided by any miracle of the Spirit, “how is it that ye don’t understand” (Matt. 16:11). The Son of God spoke to all who approach the Bible, “whoever reads let him understand” (Matt. 24:15), and plainly explained to His accusers that they didn’t understand because they were listening to Satan rather than to God (John 8:41-44).

The disciples understood the words of Jesus when He spoke about Elijah coming first (Matthew – 17:13), but they didn’t understand the significance of His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem until after the passage of some time (John 12:16). As with information or communication in any human endeavor, it is easy to draw a false conclusion, and behave according to a wrong principle, if we aren’t patient enough to get all the pertinent data firmly in mind first.

When Philip approached the Ethiopian, the question that led to their study implied the possibility of understanding even the difficult book of Isaiah: “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30). The Ethiopian’s answer implied likewise the same possibility, and showed that he agreed with the Spirit-led Philip on the matter: “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (verse 31).

Consider the confidence of the apostle Paul. He wrote in Romans 1:20 that we can understand if we observe correctly & reason correctly: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” To the church in Ephesus – and by extension to Christians everywhere – he wrote, “when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:3-4). Later in the same epistle he wrote of those outside of Christ that they don’t understand because they are ignorant – and they are ignorant because they are blind of heart (4:18). That is, their hearts were not open to seeing God. Their affections and interests were elsewhere; they didn’t really want to hear, respect, honor and obey God’s word.

The apostle Peter added his contribution to the affirmation that common people – unaided by anything more than a cursory education and common sense – can understand the Bible. In II Peter 2:12 he argued that those who oppose the gospel are speaking evil of things that they don’t understand, and shall perish in their own corruption. Their corruption is not in their ignorance, but in their unwillingness to be taught by the word of God. Peter himself acknowledged that Paul wrote “some things hard to be understood,” but those things are “hard,” not impossible. Understanding God’s word begins with the will to know the word of God, and results from listening to it.

To say that man cannot understand the Bible, that we cannot understand it without some divine intervention, or that we cannot “understand it alike” is to argue with the Bible itself. As James told the Hebrew Christians, “if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge” (James 4:11).

It is strange indeed for a man to put into writing the argument that one cannot understand the written

word of God – or cannot understand it without help. For what purpose would God create that false teacher with the ability to write words that can be understood, but would Himself write so as not to be understood? To borrow a wonder from the eloquent Winston Churchill, “It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” To admit that one can understand human speech and the ways of the world, and yet to suggest that he cannot understand the word of God, is to hold that God is *incapable* of communicating so as to be understood – OR IS UNWILLING TO DO SO. What kind of God is that? Whom do such people worship – such a deceitful god... or perhaps themselves and their own vain imaginations?

Verse 12 concludes Nehemiah’s chapter 8 record of that day in Jerusalem: *And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.* They had a good life, and did good works with great joy, because they had understood the Bible. If you understand it when you read it, glorify God – If you don’t, read some more. Gather more information, give it some more time and thought. God loves you, and He wants to save you... by the word... which He has given to you in writing... so you can understand Him and love Him in return.