

## Case Studies in Hermeneutics: Difficult Passages in the Bible Explained

(Based on 18 General Principles)

1. Psalm 22:16, In what way was this fulfilled, even though the Psalmist could not understand it?
  - a. Literally, through the crucifixion.
  - b. If First Advent prophecy was literally fulfilled to the last detail, we can expect Second Advent prophecy to be fulfilled literally.
2. Isaiah 61:1-3, A proper understanding
  - a. Who is the Spirit of the Lord God upon in verse 1?
    - i. Isaiah, Jesus, or someone else?
    - ii. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, we see this is clearly Jesus (Luke 4:18-21).
    - iii. Nobody else today can claim this special anointing of God for themselves. The Bible is clear that Jesus is the subject of the passage.
    - iv. Notice in Luke that Jesus stops in the middle of verse 2. It is already established that this text speaks of Him. It is reasonable to conclude that through verse 3 describes Christ's Second Advent work.
3. Ephesians 2:8-10, Perspicuity of Scripture, We understand unclear texts in light of clear texts, and we do not build doctrine on unclear texts.
  - a. Grace through faith in Jesus Christ first, then the works follow. Romans 3:24 is another simple text that is in plain agreement.
  - b. Unclear texts like Philippians 2:12 cannot refer to justification of the believer, because of the contradiction which would be imposed upon the very clear text in Ephesians. Therefore, we understand in terms of the daily life of the believer, which fits the context and is also consistent with Scripture.
4. Matthew 15:9, What worship of Whom is "in vain?"
  - a. Context is king here. Jesus quotes Isaiah to Jews and Pharisees who were worshiping the Father, but in vain. In the context (Matthew 15:1-9), Jesus points out that they were avoiding the duties of God's Law by adhering to the letter of man-made laws.
  - b. They were not worshiping God the Father properly.

- c. “And in vain they worship Me” refers to the unacceptable way the scribes and Pharisees were worshiping God. In the passage, nobody is worshiping Jesus—the hearers did not accept Him as God. So to pull that phrase out of context and make it mean that worship of Jesus is a vain thing is intellectually dishonest.
5. Did Jesus die before or after the curtain of the temple was torn?
  - a. Matthew 27:50-51 seems to say after, while Luke 23:45-46 seems to say before.
  - b. Explanation: when determining chronology in the gospel accounts, we always defer to Luke, since he states that he was writing an “orderly” account (Luke 1:3). Matthew often writes thematically. This is one of the things mentioned that happened miraculously at around the time of the crucifixion. If we continue to read in the Matthew account, we also find mentioned those who came to life “after His resurrection” (Matthew 27:53), and this clearly did not occur until after the burial and resurrection of Jesus, which accounts follow. There is no contradiction, only a difference in style and purpose of the gospel writers.
6. Did Jesus ascend to Paradise the same day as the crucifixion?
  - a. Luke 23:43 says that the penitent criminal will meet Jesus in Paradise that very day. How is this possible if He would be buried in the tomb until early Sunday morning?
  - b. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, particularly verse 8, underscores the same thing Jesus said, and adds specific detail. Luke 16:22 teaches the same thing.
  - c. We explain it this way. The spirit goes to heaven in God’s presence at the moment of death. The body goes to the grave. When Jesus died on the cross, His Spirit immediately went to heaven where it was since eternity past, to be with God the Father. Likewise, the penitent man’s spirit went to heaven. In the meantime, both physical bodies were placed in the grave on earth.
  - d. The Ascension in Acts 1:9 is a different event, and it occurred a few weeks later. John 20:17 should be understood within this context. Jesus had risen from the dead, and would make several post-resurrection appearances to His disciples in the interim.
7. How did Judas Iscariot die?

- a. We have two accounts, Matthew 27:5-8, and Acts 1:18. They are both true and agree on every point. There is no contradiction at all.
  - i. Judas committed suicide by hanging himself.
  - ii. The rope broke, and he fell from the place where he had hung himself, possibly a tree, and “his entrails gushed out.”
  - iii. The money paid him was blood money, and was used to buy a field for burial of foreigners. It could not be placed in the treasury.
  - iv. Whether Acts 1:18 is listing details, or (quite possibly) Judas hung himself in that very field, we have no issue with the text.
8. Some would complain that the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament” are not in the Bible. What shall we say to this charge?
  - a. Perhaps not in these exact words, but they most certainly are! They are in Hebrews 9:11-18. According to this passage, a testament is a blood covenant. The old covenant was made by God through Moses and involved the death of animals. The new covenant was made by God Himself and involved His own death. Because of the involvement of blood and death, the old covenant is the “Old Testament”, and the new covenant is the “New Testament.”
9. Some object to the “Trinity”, since that word is not found in the Bible.
  - a. My response is this. The Bible clearly teaches the existence of one God existing eternally in three Persons. If we called the doctrine “Three” or “One” or anything else, the naysayers still would not believe.
  - b. We have plurality in the Godhead from the very beginning (Genesis 1:26). John 1:1-3 teaches the distinctness and equality of the Word (Jesus, God the Son) with the Father. In at least four places we have the Trinitarian (Triune God) formula mentioned, including God the Holy Spirit, as a third distinct Person. Scriptural evidence includes, but is not limited to, Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:18-19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and 1 John 5:7.
  - c. The Trinity is a major doctrine of the Christian faith. It is difficult for the human mind to comprehend, but we cannot expect to understand everything about the infinite God. If we throw out everything we cannot fully understand, then we will end up with an empty faith indeed. So please do not reject it based on your own understanding. My view is this: God teaches it in His revealed Word, the Bible; I shall accept it as truth.