



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 1: What is the Bible?

### Unit 1.4: Hearing God Loud & Clear



#### I) The Name Above All Names

- In our first three units of this section, we established the structure of the Bible as God’s Word, the purpose of the Bible as God’s revelation, and the foundation of the Bible as God’s truth. Now as we continue our journey of biblical discovery, we need to connect those dots a little further. If the Bible comes right from the mouth of God, then its words are not only trustworthy in building our worldview, but also authoritative in telling us how we should live in this world to the glory of our Holy Creator. We are constantly reminded of this unequalled authority of God in several passages throughout Scripture. Hebrews 6:13 teaches us, *“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself.”* And speaking specifically of the divine authority of Christ, Paul reminds us in [Philippians 2:9-11](#) that He has been given *“the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* This means that as believers in Christ, we do not stand over the Bible in judgement of its truth, but we stand *underneath* the Bible in submission to its authority over every area of our lives.

#### II) On a “Need to Know” Basis

- If the Bible is the highest source of **authority** in our lives, and God writes from this exalted position to reveal truth about Himself and the world, then we can be confident that what we need to know has been spoken to us *loud and clear* in the Holy Scriptures. As renowned author J.I. Packer states, *“The Bible is word-for-word God-given revelation that is complete and comprehensible. It contains all that the church needs to know in this world for its guidance in the way of salvation and service.”* In other words, God wants us to know Him and His expectations for our lives. So, when He speaks through Scripture He does so with an authority that demands obedience but also with a clarity that offers understanding.

#### III) Having a Way With Words

- As mentioned in Unit 1.2, God has spoken to the world through the general revelation of nature and this alone provides enough proof that He has the authority of a powerful Creator. But one of the reasons God also gave us special revelation of Himself in Scripture is that we can understand Him best through the communication of **words**. In his book, *A Clear and Present Word*, Theologian Mark Thompson writes, *“Words can be intensely personal and it is not at all surprising that God should use words in His plan to draw men and women to Himself. To say that God speaks is a short-handed way of saying that God is committed to personal relationships.”* God chose to use the words of the Bible to speak to us because He not only has a desire to be understood, but He intends for that understanding to lead to a personal relationship with Him.

#### IV) Now, Let’s Be Clear

- So, when we say God speaks to us *“loud and clear”* in the Bible, it means His words are *“loud”* because they have authority, and they are *“clear”* because God has the superior ability to communicate His message with ideal precision. In simpler terms, God does not have a speech impediment, so when He speaks He does so with the expectation that He will be understood and obeyed. This understanding is made possible for us through what theologians call *“the clarity of Scripture.”* As Dr. Wayne Grudem notes, *“The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”*

## V) The Main Things are the Plain Things

- One of the ways that God speaks clearly in the Bible is by providing the repetition of main ideas to promote understanding. Since the revelation of God found in Scripture is progressive, this repetition of key concepts offered from different perspectives gives us a complete picture of what God is trying to say to our limited, finite minds. The reason we have the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is that God wanted to be crystal clear about the nature, purpose, and finished work of His Son Jesus Christ. We also have the letters of Paul so that God could expound upon these realities of Christ and offer us even more understanding of what was accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. Take for instance the progressive revelation of Christ's atonement for our sins. John 3:16, says, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. You might read for the first time and say, "How and why does giving up His son offer human beings eternal life?" So, God offers us more clarity in 2 Corinthians 5:21, which says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* But, you may still ask, *"How did He become our sin?"* Fortunately, God graciously goes even further to clarify this concept in 1 Peter 2:24 by stating, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."* So, the clarity of Scripture does not mean that every verse by itself is always clear. It does mean that through repetition in Scripture we will discover that the *main* things eventually become the *plain* things.

## VI) Speaking Wisdom into Simple Minds

- When Jesus came into the world, He came to bring light to a dark universe. As the incarnated Word of God, Christ shed light by revealing the divine truth of God. Now we have the written Word of God through the Scriptures, and it is the Holy Spirit who sheds illuminating light on this revealed truth. So, for those who are born-again believers, there is enough spiritual light provided by God that He expects people of all ages and abilities to understand His Word at some level. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7 we read, *"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children. There is a tacit assumption here that if we are to teach the Bible to our children, then Scripture is clear enough for a child to understand. Psalms 119:130 also reiterates this idea by stating, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple." Finally, in Psalms 19:7, God reminds us again that *"the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."* These verses teach us that we don't need a seminary education or a minister's interpretation to understand the Bible. We can learn God's truth with nothing more than a Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*

## VII) Experiencing Technical Difficulties

- At this point, you may be asking yourself, *"If the Bible is so clear and I am still confused when I read it, does that mean there is something wrong with me?"* Let us find comfort that although there are areas of Scripture that even a child can understand, there are still mysteries that stump the greatest biblical scholars of each generation. The Apostle Peter himself reminds us in 2 Peter 3:16 that throughout Paul's letters to the churches in the New Testament *"there are some things in them that are hard to understand."* Sometimes our lack of understanding can be because we are not being obedient to what the Lord has already revealed. At other times we lack understanding because we want God to provide more clarity than He intended to. But the main reason that we still don't see the entire collection of Scripture with unblemished clarity is because we are seeing truth through the lens of our limited earthly perspective. As Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."*

## VIII) When Believing Becomes Understanding

- As we conclude our discussion on the authority and clarity of Scripture, let us celebrate these encouraging words from J.I. Packer: *"We should not abandon faith in anything God has taught us merely because we cannot solve all the problems which it raises. Our own intellectual competence is not the test and measure of divine truth. It is not for us to stop believing because we lack understanding, but to believe in order that we may understand."* In other words, we live in a world that says, *"Show me and I'll believe,"* but we worship a God who says, *"Believe me and I'll show."*