



THE BIBLE: GOD'S AMAZING BOOK • SESSION 5

# When God Speaks Hard Things



The Bible is God's amazing book. It teaches, encourages, comforts, and challenges us. But sometimes, it may seem confusing. Parts of it can be hard to understand, often because we live in a different time and place.

Some of the Bible seems to clash with what we think we know about God and the way the world is today. This week we'll look at some of the difficult issues. They may raise questions in your mind. Don't worry; that happens to most people!

## DAY 1—CONTRADICTIONS

1. Many individuals say they don't believe the Bible because it seems to contradict itself. There certainly are some things that, at first glance, seem to be contradictory.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and James 2:14-17. Are we saved by faith in Jesus, or are we saved by the good things we do? How might you explain these seemingly contradictory verses?

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DAY 2—THE LAW

- 2. The Old Testament law can be very confusing. It can be hard to know what applies today and what doesn't. Read Leviticus 19:26-37. Do you think we still need to keep laws like these? Why, or why not?

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DAY 3—VIOLENCE

- 3. Some Bible passages can be shocking to people who are reading them for the first time. Read Joshua 6:20-21 alongside Deuteronomy 20:16-18. Why might God have deemed it necessary to destroy everything and everyone in Jericho?

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- 4. What do you learn about God from reading Ezekiel 33:11?

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DAY 4—MIRACLES

- 5. We read about miracles throughout the Bible. Some people say these events could not be true. Read 1 Kings 17:9-16 and Mark 4:35-41. If we believe that the Bible is God's Word, how do we respond to miracles that appear to be impossible?

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DAY 5—THE KEY

- 6. The Bible was inspired by an infinite God. No wonder we finite humans struggle to understand it at times. Read 1 Corinthians 2:11-13. Who always understands God's thoughts and words, and what is necessary for understanding the hard things in God's Word?

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If you decide to really dig in and start reading the Bible for yourself, you will eventually come to parts that seem confusing or troubling.



Not everything God says in the Bible is easy. That shouldn't come as a surprise though. By definition, God is infinite and humans are finite. Clearly, there will be times when human limitation will hinder our understanding. But that doesn't mean we should check our brains at the door.

### **Faith and Intelligence Can Coexist**

Someone may have suggested to you that Bible-believing people are less intellectual than nonreligious folks. To be sure, there are some really smart atheists. But there are intelligent people of faith too. Consider, for instance, John Donne, Isaac Newton, René Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, Gregor Mendel, to name only a few.

It's possible that you've met people who started out as Christian believers and lost their faith when they went to a university. But did you know that there are also atheists who had set out to disprove the Bible and ended up coming to faith during their investigation? Look into it. You may be surprised.

But the greatest example of a truly great mind who believed the Bible is Jesus. You might think of Jesus as a gentle, kind, and moral man. But have you ever noticed how smart He is?

Read the Gospels. Notice how the intellectual elite of Jesus's day continually tried to stump or trap Him. Look at His responses. They are nothing short of witty and brilliant. And why not? According to 1 Corinthians 1:24, Jesus is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." He is the embodiment of wisdom itself!

### **Aren't There Contradictions?**

If you read the Bible from start to finish, you may discover some things that seem contradictory.

Rest assured that none of these remotely affect the overall message of the book. Nevertheless, they can be troubling. Some people have discounted the whole Bible because these things don't make sense to them—and that's a pity.

Like any ancient text, the Bible contains parts that are difficult for modern readers. But when we come to understand more about ancient languages and cultures, and delve deeper into the context surrounding these hard passages, many of these inconsistencies disappear.

### **What about the Law?**

Most of us can see the rightness of certain Old Testament laws, such as "You shall not murder" and "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:13, 15). But what about those seemingly odd laws? Never wear clothing woven from two different kinds of material. Avoid eating lobster. Don't trim your beard. Are we supposed to obey all the laws? Some of them? None of them? Who decides?

These are great questions. Like many questions about the Bible, people have debated these issues for centuries. Although not everyone has reached the same conclusion, there are several interpretations that make sense. Again, understanding Bible-time culture helps. And reading the laws in the context of the New Testament also brings clarity. If these

*I had been praying for a Bible study where I would get the meat of the Word and that's what I got in Community Bible Study. I am forever grateful.*

—Lynn Marie

questions concern you, why not study the Bible for yourself? It's amazing how many questions get answered when we study with open minds and hearts.

### Why the Violence?

Sooner or later in your Bible reading, you'll come to passages that involve war and violence. You may wonder, *What kind of God have we got here who destroys all these people?* That's a fair question. Like the other questions we've discussed, there are no quick or easy answers. Making peace with the biblical accounts of bloodshed requires patient and careful study.

Reading difficult passages in light of the rest of the Bible is always imperative. Understanding the culture and practices—especially war practices—of the nations that surrounded Israel in Bible times is critical. And coming to terms with the relationships between sin and death, justice and mercy, evil and judgment, sovereignty and free will, and present and eternity is crucial.

Most important of all, is accepting the fact that when people do things their own way instead of God's (the Bible calls this *sin*), things go awry. Sin results in pain and death—always. If not right away, then down the road. If not here, then in eternity. There are no exceptions.

But be sure of this: God does not delight in people's deaths (see Ezekiel 33:11). In fact, that's why Jesus came. He didn't come to the earth and become human just so we could have an example of how to live. He came to the earth to deal with humankind's sin problem. Jesus did this by dying the death that sinners deserve. Anyone who repents of their sin and accepts His sacrificial death on their behalf can live. Jesus, who was innocent in every way, suffered appalling violence when He died on the cross—but He died willingly, out of love for us.

### What about Miracles?

The Bible is full of miracles. Improbable as they seem, we can't just ignore them. Take them away, and there is no message left. That's because at the heart of Christianity we find these miracles:

- God became a man in Jesus.
- God raised Jesus from the dead.

Without these two miracles, the Christian faith is nothing more than a set of pious platitudes supported by some common-sense advice.

It's true that miracles contradict what we understand about nature and science. However, the laws of nature are simply generalizations about what usually happens. They don't explain why something happens or why it should always happen. Scientific laws cannot, by definition, exclude the possibility of miracles. Of course, by their very nature, miracles are uncommon—but this doesn't mean they never occur. The Bible presupposes that there is an all-powerful, wonder-working God. If that's so, then we shouldn't be surprised if He sometimes chooses to act outside of our boxes.

### Talk to the Author

On one hand, the good news of Jesus Christ is so simple, even a child can understand it. But on the other, there's no denying that parts of the Bible are challenging. Even the apostle Peter admitted that parts are difficult (see 2 Peter 3:16). And the apostle Paul said that the only "person" who can comprehend God's thoughts is the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:11). However, God sent His Spirit into the world to teach us God's truth. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:16) is available to help us interpret and understand it.

Don't give up on the Bible because parts of it are hard to comprehend. Instead, ask God to help you. He will never turn away anyone who has a humble, seeking heart.