

## **LESSON 23**

### **GREAT BIBLE THEMES**

#### **MYSTERY OR SIMPLICITY**

Bible scholars have always recognized that the Word of God contains many things that are hard to understand. We have noticed that God's plans for the salvation of the world were referred to as a mystery which was unknown in olden times but which was revealed to us by the Spirit of God. The fact that it contains many deep things may cause some to conclude that man cannot fully understand his duty to God through a study of the Bible. We want to examine this thought in our study for today. The following questions are presented for our consideration.

1. Give several mysteries that are mentioned in the Bible. What is mysterious about each?
2. The Bible also refers to the simplicity of God's teachings. List several items illustrating this point.
3. How can the Bible be both simple and mysterious? Use the example of the fall of the walls of Jericho to illustrate your answer.
4. How was Eve beguiled from the simplicity of God's instructions?

## LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS

No one questions the fact that the Bible contains many things that are hard to understand. Peter in his second letter referred to Paul's writings as follows: 2 Peter 3:16, "As also in all his (Paul's) epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are

\_\_\_\_\_ which they that are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their \_\_\_\_\_." Not only does this verse state that some things are hard to be understood, but it also points out the danger of wresting the scriptures to our own destruction. This term "wrest" means to twist or turn a passage from its original meaning.

In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul enumerates several things that are difficult to understand. Let us notice these. "And without controversy great is the \_\_\_\_\_: God was \_\_\_\_\_, justified in the \_\_\_\_\_, seen of \_\_\_\_\_, preached \_\_\_\_\_, believed on \_\_\_\_\_, received \_\_\_\_\_." Some of these six items are easier to understand than others. Do you understand how the all-powerful Creator of our universe could be manifest in the flesh? Or how He could ascend into heaven while His disciples were watching? Did you ever see an angel? Why did Jesus give His life in order to be preached among the Gentiles? In answer to this last question we might say that He gave His life to save the Gentiles as well as others. This is correct, but why He did it is still a deeper question.

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus he referred to the relationship that should exist between the husband and wife. He compared this to the relationship between Christ and His church. In Ephesians 5:32 he says: "This is \_\_\_\_\_: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

There are many deep things in the book of Romans. This is, perhaps, the most profound book in the Bible with justification by faith as its theme. What did Paul mean by the last expression in 2 Corinthians 12:2 when he was referring to a man he had known when he said, "such an one \_\_\_\_\_?"

Who will claim that he understands the meaning of all the symbols of the book of Revelation? To anyone who has not studied the Word of God a great deal, difficult passages will be found on nearly every page. Does this mean, then, that there are so many difficulties that we just cannot possibly understand it, so we need not try? Before we draw any such conclusion we should consider some further teachings of the Word of God.

By way of contrast to the reasoning above, we should consider one of the things that caused Paul a great deal of concern. Notice how he expressed this in 2 Corinthians 11:3, "But I \_\_\_\_\_, lest by any means, as the \_\_\_\_\_ beguiled \_\_\_\_\_ through his \_\_\_\_\_, so your minds should be corrupted from the \_\_\_\_\_."

You will find it helpful to state Paul's fear for the Christians at Corinth in your own words. Did Paul refer to the "simplicity" that is in Christ? This term means the quality of being simple with no complications. Does this seem to be in conflict with the idea that God's Word contains many difficulties?

Let us examine the comparison used in this last verse. Paul was fearful lest the same thing would happen to the Christians at Corinth that happened to Eve in the beginning. Let us look back to the record of that event so that we may get the force of the illustration. After God had created the world and placed Adam and Eve in the garden, He gave them instructions as follows, (Genesis 3:2-3) "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ lest ye die." (Genesis 3:2-3)

Re-read the words you have written in the blanks above. Is there anything about this statement that is difficult to understand? Remember, we are studying the mysteries and simplicities of God's Word. Would it be correct to say that the statement, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it," is very easily understood? The simplicity of the statement is further brought out by noticing that ten of the eleven words are of one syllable each and the eleventh has only two syllables.

It would not be correct to say that there is nothing difficult about understanding why God did not want them to eat of the fruit of this tree? Do you know why such a tree was placed in the garden? Why should they be separated from God (death means separation) just because they had eaten of the fruit of this tree. We should possibly suggest a number of partial answers to these questions, but after all there are some things that we cannot understand. Would it be correct to say that in this illustration the instructions to Adam and Eve were very plain and simple, but there are some difficulties in understanding God's part? Could it be that man's duty to God is always simply stated and that the

mysteries have to do with God's part? Keep this question in mind as we look to another illustration.

Many years later the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. After they had crossed the river Jordan under the leadership of Joshua, they captured the city of Jericho. Let us notice the instruction the Lord gave the people. These are found in Joshua 6:3-5, "And ye shall compass the city,

\_\_\_\_\_, and go round about the city \_\_\_\_\_.  
Thus shalt thou do \_\_\_\_\_. And  
\_\_\_\_\_ shall bear before the ark  
seven trumpets of ram's horns: and the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ye shall \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and the priests  
shall \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_. And it shall  
come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's  
horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_;  
and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall  
ascend up every man straight before him. You will recall that the  
people were to ascend up every man straight before him." You  
will recall that the people followed instructions given in the verses  
above to see if they are so deep and hard to understand that the  
people could not be expected to follow them, or if they are very  
plainly and simply given. Of course, man's part in the capture of  
Jericho is very easily understood. Does this mean, however, that  
we understand all about how the children of Israel captured this  
city and that there are no mysteries about it? Do you know why  
God used this means of giving the city to them? How could the  
shouting and blowing of trumpets cause the walls of a city to fall?  
Why march around the city once a day for six days and seven

times on the seventh? We can discuss a number of things about these questions, but after all we just do not know. There are elements about them that we cannot understand. The most important part of this illustration for us is to notice that plainness and simplicity characterize man's part, and that some mysterious things that we cannot understand characterize God's part. Man's part is to obey, God's part is to keep his promises when we obey.

You will recall the story of Naaman who was afflicted with the terrible disease of leprosy. If you are not very familiar with this story you will enjoy reading the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of **2 Kings 5:1-27**, **Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see**

how he seeketh a quarrel against me. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto

other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for

**ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow. (AKJV).** For our purpose we want to notice the instructions the prophet of God gave him. This is found in verse ten. "And Elisha sent a messenger unto him (Naaman), saying,

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Could Naaman have misunderstood what the prophet told him to do? Can you understand why washing in the Jordan River would cure him of his leprosy? Our conclusion that man's part is easily understood, but God's part contains things difficult to understand, is further strengthened by this illustration.

Many other illustrations could be given, but we want to turn to God's instructions regarding our salvation today in a further consideration of the conclusion stated above. The references we give now have been used a number of times before, but they are so vital to the main part of today's lesson that we give them again. Notice Christ's marching orders to His apostles as given in Mark 16:15-16, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, He that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Would one be logical in saying that he could not understand what Christ wanted people to do because there are so many difficulties to be found in a study of God's Word? Is it difficult to know the conditions of salvation given in the verse above? It may not be possible to understand why God made belief and baptism essential to salvation, but that is God's part and not man's. Man's part is easily understood.

Let us examine Acts 2:38 with this question in mind, "Are the following instructions so difficult that we cannot understand what they mean?" "Then Peter said unto them, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ in the name of Jesus Christ." This part of the verse sets forth what the people were told to do. The remainder of the verse gives God's part. Do you understand fully why the commandments in the first part of the verse carried the promises of "the \_\_\_\_\_, and ye shall receive the gift of the \_\_\_\_\_?"

As we noticed above, Paul was fearful lest the early Christians be led away from the "simplicity that is in Christ". The devil would like to lead people away from God by making the plain teaching of the Word of God seem too deep to be understood. Would the devil be succeeding in his plans if he could lead people to believe that only a few have been especially schooled in theology can really understand what people must do to be saved? Has God so hidden His message from man that only the few who have received special training can understand His purposes in the world? God's wish is that all men should be blessed, but if His message is buried in mysteries and difficult passages that "all men" cannot understand, his purpose would be defeated by this fact. Could God be so inconsistent as to do this?

The following passages indicate that Christ's message is in reach of all. The last part of Mark 12:37 says, "And the \_\_\_\_\_." Notice what Paul said about those who became Christians. 1 Corinthians 1:26, "For ye see \_\_\_\_\_, brethren, how that not

many \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_, not  
\_\_\_\_\_, are called.” Notice the  
questions James raised in James 2:5, “Hath not God  
\_\_\_\_\_ rich in faith, and heirs of  
the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him?”

Would you agree with the following conclusions? First, the Bible contains many things that challenge the best thinking of our greatest scholars, yet God has always made man’s duty plain enough for all to understand. Second, there is always the danger of being led away from the simplicity of the Bible’s teaching by the subtle beguilement of the devil.

## TEST

1. The Bible is written in such a mysterious manner that man cannot understand what God wants him to do to be saved. (True or False) \_\_\_\_\_

2. (a) Before man can be acceptable to God, he must be able to reason out every command of God and understand every detail of God's system; or, (b) Man must trust God completely, realizing that God's way is best, and when God gives commands, man must obey those commands even though he may not be able to completely understand them or reason them out.  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. The writers of the New Testament (never did, did) refer to the simplicity that is in Christ.

4. Difficult passages are wrested (twisted or turned out of their original meaning) by: (a) unstable and unlearned people, (b) wise and scholarly, (c) infidels and atheists, (d) conscientious and honest men which results in their own condemnation.

5. When Elisha the prophet of God told Naaman the leper to dip himself seven times in Jordan to be healed of his leprosy, Naaman at first refused because he: (a) could not understand what Elisha's messenger said, (b) didn't want to be healed of his leprosy, (c) thought the remedy silly and useless to dip seven times in Jordan, (d) wanted Elisha to beg and plead with him to do what he had said. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Naaman would have been healed by simply believing that Elisha had the power to heal him, or by washing six times in

Jordan instead of seven or by washing in the Abana or Pharpar rivers instead of Jordan. (True or False) \_\_\_\_\_

7. The walls of Jericho fell because: (a) the people of Israel obeyed the voice of God even though they could not see the reasoning behind such a command, (b) this was the common way of causing city walls to fall, (c) the people of Israel marched around the walls loosening its foundation, (d) the blast of the trumpets and the noise of the people shouting caused such a vibration that the walls fell. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Believers in Christ should reject baptism as part of God's plan for man's salvation because man cannot see any reason or sense in it. (True or False) \_\_\_\_\_

9. When Adam and Eve heard God tell them not to eat nor touch the fruit of a certain tree in the garden of Eden, they ate of the fruit because: (a) they desired to disobey God, (b) they could see no reason why they should not eat of it, (d) they were tired of living and wanted to see what God meant when he said they would die if they ate of it, (e) they were beguiled by the subtlety of Satan who told them they could disobey God and God would not keep his word. \_\_\_\_\_

10. The Christian is one who believes what God has said and does his will, trusting God's wisdom that God knows best. (True or False) \_\_\_\_\_

**Score:** Ten Points for Each Correct Answer \_\_\_\_\_

Correct answers to questions in Lesson 22:

1. (c)

2. (true)
3. (b)
4. (d)
5. (true)
6. (a)
7. (c)
8. (yes)
9. (save)
10. (yes)