

WHY HAS GOD GIVEN US A BIBLE So HARD TO UNDERSTAND

This is an alternate version of the Discourse given by Brother Benjamin Barton which is different than the one found in the book, PILGRIM ECHOES.

The text on which we will base at least a portion of our remarks tonight, is found in Isaiah 55:8-11, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Many are the strange questions that have been aroused by religious thought, and many are the answers that have been received; speculative, philosophical, scientific, superstitious answers besides the authoritative answer which comes only from the Bible. The Bible gives us an answer such as we cannot get from any other source. The above question has puzzled Christians from the days of our Savior, but the answer can come only from His Word.

The reason we can stand here and take this question as a topic is not because we are wiser than others, for others have been more wise and learned than we; nor because we are better than others; nor because we have a new revelation, for God's people are furnished with all that is necessary from His Word. Some may ask: "Why can you get the answer from the Bible, while others more wise than you could not?"

Because it was not the due time then for men to get it. The question with Israel under the Mosaic law with its sacrifices was: "Why did God require the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin?" This stream of blood, from Adam to the end of the Jewish age was as a bloody finger pointing to the sacrifice of Christ (Isaiah 53:7). When Luther came it was not because he was wiser or better than others that he saw So much truth, but because God saw that he was a fit man to be given the truths then due. Prophecies have to be fulfilled when the due time comes (Luke 19:40). We are now living in a time when certain truths that have been covered are being brought to view, because the due time has arrived, and he is making known these truths to those who are in the right attitude of heart. (Daniel 12:4; Habakkuk 2:2,3; Jeremiah 23:18-20) We are living in the time that was foretold, the "Time of the End."

This may mean a test to some here. How many of us have faith in the Bible? (Luke 18:8.) Some say that there is much faith in the earth.

Many have faith in the church, and minister, and creed, but very few have faith in the Bible. We should be in the attitude to say: "If that is the truth and testimony of God's Word, then it is a secondary matter what our fathers and mothers believed. We will abide by God's Word and be faithful and loyal to it."

It seems that the great God who created the Universe is thoughtful of all the interests of his people. All their needs have been supplied as far as He has seen good. We need food for the nourishment of our bodies, and beautiful things for our eyes, and sweet sounds for our ears. If He would provide these for us, would he not also provide things for our minds concerning the future? If we had been living before God gave His people a Bible, and He had told us that He would give man His revelation in a book, we would have looked forward to it eagerly, and with pleasant anticipation, and we would wonder what kind of a book it would be, A man who writes a book tries to make his subject as plain as possible, So that his meaning can be easily understood. We might conclude that if God wrote a book, He would make it So plain that none could fail to understand. We might expect that it would be So wonderful, that it could not be written by man, but by angels; that He would put a halo around it, So all would know that it was His book; that it would have a miraculous power which would heal the sick; and if anyone should say anything against it, he would drop dead instantly; and that all might be born with a Bible, and be able to understand it. When we turn to our text we answer: "No!" That is the kind we would have thought, but God has given a Bible very different from that, as different as could possibly be. Instead of angels writing it, poor imperfect men wrote it.

The only halo it has is a very dusty one. Instead of curing diseases, it has no healing power. None drop dead for talking against it, but if one had eloquence enough, like Ingersoll and others, a few hundred dollars might drop into his pocket. God might have put a preaching pocket on his Bible So that the missionaries, when they might need money, could open one and find all the money they want. Instead if this we find many begging money for missions all over the world.

Seventy-five millions do not even know that there is a Bible, and those who have it do not know what it teaches. If all could unite on one interpretation of the Bible how few would not know about it.

There would be no room for infidelity. He could have made His Bible So plain that one could not get more than one meaning from it. How easily the world could be converted; it would not be a question as to whether one had a Bible, but whether he would live up to it. It must be because the Bible which we have is the best kind of a Bible, better for us than the miraculous kind would have been. It is a mistake to suppose that God is not interested in the conversion of the world. (2 Peter 3:9; Matt. 10; 29-31.) He is far more interested in it than the missionaries themselves. Why then did He not give us a simple Bible? The reason for its obscurity must be that men have failed to grasp the heavenly Father's plan and purpose for this Gospel age. He showed that there would be some misconception and misunderstanding of Him and His plan. It is the grasping of the plan that enables us to answer the question.

The Jews could not be saved by the Law, So it took courage for Peter and Paul and others to stand up and say they were no longer under the Law. It was the same with Martin Luther, and the other reformers. It was hard for them to say that they had been mistaken. In Acts 10, we are told that Peter was called to partake of what was unclean. The sheet was let down three times. The disciples were unclean in the sight of the Jews, because they believed what the Pharisees thought was contrary to the Law. This was the first letting down of the sheet.

It was let down in the days of the Reformers, with some truths then. It has now come down the third time with things that have been hidden until this harvest. The reason God has given us a Bible So hard to understand is that is not the work of the Bible in this age to convert the world of mankind. We know this, because the world is not converted, this outside of Bible evidence (Acts 15:14-17). If such were God's purpose then the Bible did not accomplish its work, but failed. God has not tried to convert the world. He does not have to try, because He is omnipotent (John 12:37-40). If they had seen these things clearly and had understood they would have believed, but that was not God's purpose (Matthew 13:10-17; 11:23; 10:5,6; Acts 16:6,7; 1 Peter 1:10-12). God did not intend that they should never be converted, for the work of the church is the conversion of the world, but this has not yet begun, nor will it be accomplished in this age (2 Timothy 3:1,2; 2 Peter 3:3,4; Matthew 24:37; Isaiah 6:9-12; Daniel 12:1; Zephaniah 3:8-13). The "Time of Trouble" is foretold in the Bible under many different figures. This age at the second presence of Christ, is to end with the Time of Trouble, a time of great distress and sorrow. It does not mean the destruction of this planet, for the earth shall

blossom as the rose. (Isaiah 35:1,2; Genesis 8:21,22; Ecclesiastes 1:4; Isaiah 45:17,18; Genesis 13:15; 15:18; Acts 7:4,5). The present order of things will be destroyed, and a new order of things established. God's Word will continue to be misunderstood until this age is over (Zephaniah 3:8,9), then the obscurity of God's Word will be removed (Isaiah 25:7; Haggai 2:7).

God has purposed the conversion of the world, but not during the past 1900 years. The reason why He has given a Bible So hard to understand was that his plans might be hidden from all but the meek and lowly of heart, until the due time came for all to know. Our Lord was glad that these things were hidden, and thought just as the heavenly Father did. He was not anxious that the Gospel should go to the Gentiles until the due time. One truth has not been concealed that is that the sacrifice of Christ provided the only means whereby we may return to God's favor.

There are three classes of people who go to the Word of God: 1—A class who see in it many strange things hard to understand, and they give the whole matter up. 2—Some who realize that they will have to do some digging, that the nuggets do not lie on the surface; but they find these things unpopular and keep them to themselves. 3—Those who care not for unpopularity, and who cling to the truth even if it costs sacrifice. Because the Bible is difficult to understand it is possible to distinguish between those who love the Lord on the surface and those who love Him deeply. The apostles would not have had sufferings and afflictions and battles with the world if they had preached popular truths. It was the same at the Reformation; Luther boldly stood up for the Truth and for Christ and suffered for it. The obscurity of the Bible helps to show how much we love the Father and Jesus. If the Jews had known Him they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, their hearts were not ready to receive Him. Yet they were not guilty to the last degree, but were measurably blinded.

"I wot that through ignorance ye did it" (Acts 3:17).

Jesus said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). There would not be any crosses if the obscurity of the Bible did not help to make them.

Many are called but few are chosen; the way is narrow and but few find it. The obscurity of the Bible has tested the faith of Christians as nothing else could. It shows forth the measure of charity which we possess. Why are believers persecuted today? Because they

proclaim truths contrary to orthodoxy. We do not wish to make others believe as we do. Shall we injure another because he differs with us, in order to make him believe as we do? If we do, then we have been tested and found deficient in love. We should be kind, charitab- Leviticus to all even if they do not believe as we do.

God chooses a little class because he is interested in all, for the church, a "Little Flock" (Luke 12:32) is to be God's instrument for the blessing of the world (Genesis 26:4; Galatians 3:16,19), but not while she is in the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:50). Many can see that the Bible declares that perilous times shall come in the last days, men will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, and they cannot harmonize these statements with their belief that the world must be converted before His second coming, or presence of Christ. It is not the apostles who were in error, there will be perilous times (2 Timothy 3:1,2), and afterwards a better day will be ushered in.

In Isaiah 29:11 it is declared prophetically that the vision of all things (Leeser) is become as the words of a sealed book. Men have turned things upside down, as was foretold (v. 16). Men say that the conversion of the world must come before the second presence of Christ, but the Bible states the opposite (Isaiah 40\$). "His reward is with Him and His work before Him." (The reward for the church, his work is the conversion of the world.) The day in which the world is to be converted is the Judgment Day, to begin with the second presence of Christ.

It is not a 24-hour-day, but as shown in 2 Peter 3:7,8, it is a 1,000 year day. The absurdity of a 24-hour day for that work is evident. It is supposed that the Lord will set up his throne at Jerusalem, and judge the world assembled before him. The people from Europe and Asia would arrive too late unless they were miraculously caught up. John Wesley said he thought it would be a 1,000 year day, as that was the opinion of many of the early fathers.

*(Moreover, the life of each person must be read and judgment passed upon it, and thus the decisions would have to be given at the rate of 1,000 per second.) What now stands in the way of the conversion of the world? 1—Satan puts evil thoughts and desires into men's minds. Hence, if the world is to be converted Satan must be bound. 2—The missionaries now lack power and means to accomplish the work. The heathen governments interfere. It will not be so in that day, for the entire world will be under the control of Christ and the Church. 3—Suitably trained missionaries must be chosen. Men have thought that they could chose and train them, but only God could do that, and instead of a three years' training it

takes all of a consecrated life-time. 4—Ignorance, darkness, confusion prevail now, and there are So many false doctrines; but in that day the knowledge of God will fill the earth, and all will know Him. The book which is now So obscure will then be opened. Will God give a new Bible? No.

We now have the old Testament exactly as the Jews had it, but to us it is not obscure, for God has taken the obscurity away. So then God will remove the veil that is before the face of all nations, and the passages now So dark will then be clear. The way will be made So plain that even a foolish man will not err therein, but now the Bible is So obscure that even the wise men stumble at it. The Day of Judgment is called the morning, when the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in his beams; the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father. When he appears we shall be like him (Malachi 4:2; Matthew 13:43; 1 John 3:2).

Some say that it will be too late then, but God is never too late.

Billions have died without seeing that day, but these shall be awakened (John 5:28). Jesus is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (John 1:9). The light will enter their hearts also. (1 Timothy 1:4). "God will have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth." The general belief puts it the other way about; that men must come to a knowledge of the truth and then be saved. But the Bible says that men are first to be saved (saved from the Adamic curse, and from sin) and then they will receive a knowledge of the truth.

God is now selecting His missionaries. Who of the missionaries of this day ever thought of bringing forth the dead to convert them? Yet the missionaries whom God is now selecting will do this; they will convert not only man, but the wild beasts as well. (Isaiah 11:9) And even the desert shall bloom. What missionary could ever do this? Then all will be saved? No. Psalms 18:44; 66:3. As soon as they hear of him they will obey him, but with his enemies it will be only a feigned obedience (see margin). With some of these latter, as they see the goodness of God and the blessings of righteousness, this feigned obedience will change to heart obedience. But others will refuse to obey at heart. Isaiah 26:10, "Show favor to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness will he deal falsely."

Some will thus show that they are wicked at heart. For such there will be no excuse. There will then be no inherited weaknesses, and none will suffer for the sins of others; it will no longer be said that

"the fathers have eaten the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Jeremiah 31:27-30) Will it then be a second chance? No. In one sense all have had a trial, for we were all in Adam when he fell, but that was not an individual trial for us. In that day all will be dried individually. Yet none who have ever had a full opportunity (except Adam and Eve) will ever have another one (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-29). A full opportunity means one that is broad and complete, such as few have had. Those who have had 1/2 or 3/4 of a chance in this age will receive the other 1/2 or 1/4 of it then; God is no respecter of persons. We remember that in the vicinity of Boston there is a man sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. Just before he was born the mother used to watch the sights in her husband's slaughter-house, and when born he inherited a thirst for blood. Can one say that this man received a chance in this life? Such as he will get their first chance in the next age, when those who submit to that righteous rule will gain a glorious eternity.

No passage in the Bible states that all the saved will spend eternity either in heaven or on earth, as many suppose one or the other; but there are a great many passages which prove that part of the saved will spend eternity in heaven, and other verses show that part will spend eternity on earth. Both are true, and both classes will be fully satisfied with their respective abodes. Today the earth is imperfect, and yet men are loth to leave it, and they fight death with all their will power. Then the earth will be glorious and beautiful, and man will be fully satisfied.

The Gospel has not been preached in this age to convert the world, but "to take out a people for his name." But in that day all shall know the truth. God's Word shall prosper and accomplish that whereto He sent it.