

334 *Some fundamental questions about the Bible*

Let me give you three books on childcare: *Childcare for New Parents*; *Caring for Mentally and Physically Challenged Children*; and *Paediatric Surgery* – and two quotes: ‘You need to physically restrain the child...’ and ‘Using a 3" scalpel, start your incision...’

When reading what a book actually *says*, it’s important to check the *context* (e.g. ‘After anaesthetic...’); also, the *meaning* can only be fully understood given the book’s *purpose*.

Now the Bible isn’t actually ‘a book’; it’s 66 different books with different *purposes*, written in different *contexts*, so if we want to go from what it *says* to what it *means* – including for us today – the potential for misunderstanding is huge.

No worries! My Study Bible has a Preface for each book: ‘Meaning and purpose’. But hang on, that’s a human being telling me how I should understand the meaning of what the book actually says.

I’m not being awkward but if we want to know what God is saying to us, then Bible passages do have to be interpreted. And more than that; most of us have to rely on other human beings to take what the human writers actually wrote and *translate* it. But in order to convey the meaning, the translators need to first *interpret* the meaning of those texts.¹ And they were written in a totally different language and a totally different culture at a totally different time – yet more room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation!

Why ever would God use such a massively human-dependent system to communicate with us?! Maybe it’s because God loves us and wants, in any way possible, to ‘show love to a thousand generations’?

I’m sorry, but we have to rely *a lot* on our fellow humans if we want to know what God is trying to say to us. Thankfully, God is there to inspire all of us by the Holy Spirit and to point us in the right direction, but we do have to think and pray and read and compare and contrast – and not just rely on *what we’ve always been told*.

Now, we can ask about the meaning and purpose of an individual book, but that has to relate to the overall purpose of the Bible. Which is?... How about, ‘to know God better and make God better known’?

Do we know God 100%? Of course not, but I did say, ‘better’. Did the OT writers know God 100%? Of course not, but I think they made progress over the generations.

Did Jesus know God 100%. Ah, now we’re getting somewhere. If we had Jesus as our Bible study leader, wouldn’t that be great?! But we do have a written account of what Jesus said and did, so maybe that can help us to interpret the OT?

¹ In the preface to his Kingdom New Testament, NTW wrote, ‘Equally, as with all translations ever made, I have taken a particular view on point after point of interpretation, and my understanding of the many controversial passages in the New Testament shows up, naturally enough, in the translation as well.’

In response to my previous article,^[333] a friend referred to treating the OT as ‘a mixture of truth and falsehood’, while ‘our Lord accepted and affirmed the [OT] Scriptures in their entirety.’ Thoughts, anyone?

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