



## GET UNDERSTANDING

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Are you a puzzler? Jigsaws? Crosswords? Sudoku? Do you like to read or watch mysteries?

And what do you like most about mysteries? Is it the discovery that there IS a mystery? Or is it the guessing game that follows as you try to piece together clues into a meaningful pattern? Could it be the thrill of the race to be the first to solve the puzzle? Or the challenge to break down the key witness' alibi?

Or, maybe you actually hate mysteries, and it's resolution that you love—mystery solved, all the pieces in place at last, tension over so you can sleep through the night again? If you frame, or at least photograph, your completed puzzles, that's probably you.

For many people, there is something COMPELLING about a mystery. It seems to stand out as an oddity of life, or a rock in the path, that cannot be allowed to remain, that must be resolved and cleared out of the way.

And if that describes you, then your life will always be full of challenges or petty annoyances, many of which become nagging problems, because life is FULL of mysteries. Honestly, there is far more that we DON'T know or understand, than we do.

Thus, the Scriptures urge you to "Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!" (Proverbs 4:7).

### **Searching for Messiah**

Now, you have a slight sense of how provoked the Jewish readers of the Old Testament Scriptures became by the few mentions and many allusions to a Messiah (a prince or king who would resolve and restore the sovereignty and prosperity of Israel). Although they repeatedly strayed from the life to which God called them, the more burdensome life became as a result of their wandering, the more compelling was the promise of a Messiah-to-come. The more they were prevented or forbidden to conduct themselves according to their religious traditions, the more they developed a longing for deliverance. (Not unlike some of us today, as the protection of the health of the larger community compels restrictions of our habit of gathering to worship. Some chafe. Some rebel. Most long for a return to what was.)

Into the midst of this longing, this frustration, this confusion, this misty hope, came an angel from Heaven (Gabriel, by name). However, he didn't arrive in Jerusalem to the door of the Temple; instead, he appeared in an obscure village of the highlands of Israel—and not to the magistrate of the village, nor even a village elder, but to a person of no means, to a young, unmarried girl.

## A Wake Up Call

Luke 1:26-38; MSG

*God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:*

*Good morning!  
You're beautiful with God's beauty,  
Beautiful inside and out!  
God be with you.  
She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that.*

Not your everyday wake-up call!

*But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has **a surprise** for you:*

Yes, I guess it could be called a "surprise"! However, the original language expresses something more than the impact of the news—it refers to the unusual origin of the news itself: "You have found favor with God" (which is to say, God has chosen to act sovereignly on your behalf!).

*You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call His name **Jesus**.*

This is a form of the Hebrew name Jeshua (or Joshua), which literally means "Jehovah saves." It was actually a common name among first century Jews, as the historians of that time testify—an indicator of the hope that was growing among the people. Curiously, there was another Jesus in the Gospel accounts. As if to highlight the irony of the people's choice, the Roman Governor Pilate asked, "Which would you have me release to you: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews, or (Jesus) Barabbas, the insurrectionist?"

Of Mary's Jesus, the angel said,

*He will be great,  
be called 'Son of the Highest.'  
The Lord God will give Him  
the throne of His father David;  
He will rule Jacob's house forever—  
no end, ever, to His kingdom."*

*Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."*

*The angel answered,  
The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
the power of the Highest hover over you;  
Therefore, the child you bring to birth  
will be called Holy, Son of God.*

Incredulous wonder was to be expected to an announcement of such proportions. To settle her doubts, the angel added this bit of information:

*"And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."*

And that really sums it up. *Nothing is impossible with God.*  
Nothing that He undertakes is too difficult for Him. Nor can it be prevented.  
And, if He has chosen to use you, it will not be impossible for you to achieve it.  
Let that sink in for a moment...

*And Mary said,  
Yes, I see it all now:  
I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.  
Let it be with me  
just as you say.  
Then the angel left her.*

Perfectly appropriate response. "Whatever You say, Lord. Whatever You require. Your will be done."

### **Unfolding Mystery**

Secondary theme: Do you like to re-watch or re-read mysteries you've seen or read before? Do you work the same puzzles over again? Or, do you usually move on? Been there, done that, got the t-shirt.

When it comes to the works of God in our lives, this is a serious danger, as it has been for God's people throughout history. God's activities are not two-dimensional; they don't occur in a flash. The Father didn't turn to the Son and say, "You go save the world, and I'll go wash up."

Like peeling the layers of an onion, God's works are "a little here, a little there," gradually unfolding, like a bolt of fine cloth for the examination of a prospective buyer, but over years and centuries of time.

Who has read through the entire Bible at least once? And do you know everything it contains? Do you understand all that it reveals? Of course not.

Yet, for some of you, that achievement marks the pinnacle of your intentional exploration of "*the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.*" Now, to re-read the Scriptures, they seem like (Isaiah 28:13):

"Da, da, da, da,  
blah, blah, blah, blah.  
That's a good little girl,  
that's a good little boy."

And like toddlers, [you] will get up and fall down, get bruised and confused and lost.

Is there any other book you have ever read, from which you walked away imagining that you knew and understood its author and his full intentions? A superficial reading can only give you a superficial knowledge, at best. And when it comes to understanding the mysteries of God, a superficial awareness is not enough to solve the puzzle, to do the will of God.

If this describes you, then you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Whatever you once had has leaked out, and the evidence of what I say is your lack of hunger to know God more, to grow to the next level of understanding. The Holy Spirit authored the Book, and only He can reawaken you to the next depth of its wisdom that awaits you.

Yesterday's understanding will be today's ignorance, if you don't keep your heart open to the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

## **Beware a Hard Heart**

Don't grow weary of waiting for God. Don't become cynical or pessimistic.

Israel grumbled about every new hardship they encountered in the wilderness, and God didn't like it.

The Red Sea stood like a wall between them and their destiny of freedom. "Why did you bring us out here?" they cried.

The chariots of the Egyptian army chased them down to the edge of the Sea. They panicked, and cried, "What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt?"

The Sea parted and they walked across on dry ground. Then the Sea returned and swallowed the Egyptian chariots and soldiers. But within a few days, they could find no water to drink, and they complained. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded.

A month later, they complained again, "You have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death!" So, the Lord gave them manna—special delivery, every morning, all they needed.

When they reached Rephidim, they found no water again, and demanded, "Give us water to drink! Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

They looked to Moses to solve all their problems, and nearly wore him out. So, he introduced them to Jehovah. But when they heard the thunder and saw the lightning flashing and the smoke that billowed from the mountain top, they panicked and cried out, "God is too scary! Don't let Him speak directly to us or we'll die! You speak to us in His place."

God gave them His Ten Commandments and the people agreed to this covenant, but after Moses climbed the mountain again to speak with God, and was gone for more than a month, the people began to grumble and they complained to Aaron, "Moses is not a leader. We want gods we can see. Come on, make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses."

Do you get the picture? No matter how God provided for them, it was never on time and it was never enough. They grumbled and complained over and over again. Yesterday's miracle was over; do something more!

The amazing thing about God was that He did it over and over again. He was gracious and generous to them.

The amazing thing about Moses was that he kept trying patiently to lead them to God, but they weren't very interested, childishly preferring just to follow him.

The amazing thing about the Israelites was that they didn't want to understand, they weren't interested in growing up; they just wanted to be provided for, and whenever their need wasn't met, they threw another tantrum.

These are trying days through which the Lord is leading us. The whole world is being tested—that we might discover that we can't do it all for ourselves, that we need a Savior, that we need a relationship with God for ourselves.

If you don't know, or lose sight of the fact that God is leading His Church and has chosen this path through the wilderness for us, you, too, will revert to childish manipulations.

## Examples for Us

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

<sup>1</sup> *I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground.* <sup>2</sup> *In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses.* <sup>3</sup> *All of them ate the same spiritual food,* <sup>4</sup> *and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.* <sup>5</sup> **Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.**

<sup>6</sup> **These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did,** <sup>7</sup> *or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry."* <sup>8</sup> *And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.*

<sup>9</sup> *Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites.* <sup>10</sup> **And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death.** <sup>11</sup> **These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.**

<sup>12</sup> *If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.* <sup>13</sup> **The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.**

I am not just weary, but grieving today, for the many professing Christians, and pastors among them, who spend their days chafing with frustration and complaining heatedly about what is happening around us and to us today. Social media is rife with their diatribes.

When you grumble and gripe about "infringements on your rights" and oppression/persecution by worldly systems, how are you any different than the average person in America, or anywhere else? Is your Christian voice lost in the roar of the crowd?

## Distinctive Voices

In these difficult and dark days, how are you exalting the Name and Spirit of Jesus Christ? What uniquely Christian response are you making?

How are you demonstrating an unmitigated hope? An unending love? An unperturbable peace?

If you grumble and complain, how will others know that you are a Christian?

When they're in your presence, will they feel HIS presence? When you speak, will they hear HIS words? When you leave, will HIS fragrance remain? What is your witness for Christ?

What are we to do? Say nothing? Do nothing? Just let the world erode our rights and disrespect our Bible?

Not at all! But the weapons of our warfare are NOT worldly. On the contrary, we depend on divine power—when we trust God implicitly, when we pray to Him intently, when we worship the Lord fervently, when we listen to His words attentively.

This is the Christian distinctive. This is what sets the Church apart from other societies and communities. It may appear ineffective on the outside, but its because we are working on the INSIDE—behind the scenes, where it truly counts.

If we fail to learn this lesson, if we continue to thrash about as the world does, we will be swept away by its current and lose sight of the Kingdom of God, which is most surely coming into the world.

*“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some people think of slowness; on the contrary, He is patient with you; for it is not His purpose that anyone should be destroyed, but that everyone should turn from his sins” (2 Peter 3:9).*

Let us all be clear about this one thing: it is not God’s purpose to destroy anyone; it is His purpose that everyone come to an understanding of the truth and be saved.

So, “Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!” And live your life from your understanding of what the Lord has purposed. Let your attitude, your speech, and your deeds demonstrate the distinctive grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Know the Lord. Be filled with hope. Rejoice always. And pray without ceasing. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.