

# The Inspiration of the Bible and Its Clarity

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In the science fiction movie, *Contact*, starring Jodie Foster and based on a novel written by Carl Sagan, a message is received from outer space. After much difficulty the message is decoded and it turns out to be plans for building some sort of a machine. The assumption on the part of most characters in the movie is that the message has come from some superior race of people out there somewhere. Because the message is so difficult to decode and because the significance of it is so unclear, serious consideration is not really given to God as being the source of this message.

If God exists and if God has revealed his will to mankind in a written form, what characteristics should that document have? We cannot know with certainty a priori all of the characteristics of such a book, but there are many characteristics that it would be reasonable and logical for it to possess. One such characteristic would be that this book would tell mankind things that are important for humanity's temporal and eternal welfare. Not only should this book from God reveal important truths, it should be easy to understand. In other words, if the Bible is the divinely inspired will of God in written form, it is logical that the Bible would possess clarity.

The possession of clarity does not of itself prove that a writing comes from God, but clarity is a characteristic that one would expect of a divinely inspired message from a Supreme Being. If God were to send mankind an important message which could affect mankind's eternal destiny, one would not expect the message to be so complicated that only scientists and scholars would be able to decode it after much effort, as in the movie *Contact*. One would not expect the message to be so obscure that the design, the intent and the origin of the message would be unclear and uncertain.

The biblical text itself admits that some portions of sacred scripture can be difficult to discern (2 Pet. 3:15-16). However, the more frequent suggestion is that the message of the Bible is easily understood if one approaches it with the proper attitude. The Israelites were instructed to understand God's commands and to "teach them diligently" to their children (Deut. 6:6-7). God's will was not only something that the scribes and scholars could discern, but also the unschooled parent could know God's law. Furthermore, even their children could learn God's word.

As Wayne Grudem explains, "Jesus affirmed the clarity of scripture on many occasions. We never hear Jesus saying something like this: 'I see why you are confused and why you disagree. The sacred writings do not make much sense on this subject.' Instead, Jesus says things like, 'Have you not read ...' (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:14; 22:31); 'Have you never read in the scriptures...' (Mt. 21:42); or 'You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God' (Mt. 22:29)." (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 106). The problem was not a lack of clarity of the scriptures, but a failure on the part of people to read and understand God's word.

The scriptures are able to make the simple person wise (Ps. 19:7; 119:130). Wayne Grudem explains that the ability to understand the message of scripture "is more a moral and spiritual than intellectual ability ... Scripture is able to be understood by all unbelievers who will read it sincerely seeking salvation, and by all believers who will read it while seeking God's help in understanding it" (Ibid., p. 107). What Grudem is suggesting is apparent in the book of Proverbs in the word "fool." The "fool" in Proverbs is not an ignorant person with a low I.Q. The

"fool" is an immoral person who rebels against God and who does not want to obey God (e.g. Prov. 1:7; 10:23; 13:19; 14:9). The fool is blinded to understanding the truth by willful pride.

Homer Hailey, in commenting on Isaiah 35:8, points out that the word "fool" is never used of an inexperienced or uneducated person, but rather of a despiser of wisdom, of a proud person, of a person who is right in his own eyes, or of a stubborn person. On the other hand, the humble person can understand the truth of God's word, whether that person has a low or a high I.Q., a grade school or a graduate school education. Gus Nichols had very little education, but he had a profound grasp of God's will.

If the above is true regarding the clarity of scripture, what are some practical implications? Grudem says that we should never assume "that only those who know Greek and Hebrew, or only ... Bible scholars, are able to understand the Bible rightly ... Christians must never give up to the scholarly 'experts' the task of interpreting Scripture; they must keep doing it every day for themselves" (Ibid., pp. 109-10). While we should seek the assistance of experts, we should be like the noble Bereans and study God's word ourselves (Acts 17:11).

Another practical implication from the above is that we should approach the study of God's word in prayer and humility. It is possible for us to be wrong in our interpretation of scripture, but a pure heart will help us to minimize incorrect interpretations. Not only should we make use of all the tools of scholarly research at our disposal in Bible study, we should be diligent in prayer for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). We should strive to be people of holy intentions and sincere love. God wants us to know the truth, and we can know it from his divine word (Jn. 8:32).