

Why do we read the Bible in Church when the Bible sometimes seem foreign and ambiguous?

By the Rev. Joshua Wong

In March we continue a reflection from *Introducing the Lessons of the Church Year* by Frederick Houk Borsch. His book speaks about different aspects of how the Bible is relevant to understanding the purpose of the church.

The books of the Bible were written during a period of over a millennium and a half, with the oldest parts composed around 1500-1400 BC and the most recent books from the late first century AD. These books cover the entire span of time from the creation of the universe to its final consummation — but most focus on roughly the period of their composition. If you'd like to learn more about when each book of the Bible was written, read here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/learn/bible-101/about-the-bible/when-was-the-bible-written/>

It's important to understand why we read the Bible or study the Bible when at times it seems foreign and ambiguous to our times. Because the biblical narratives often were given in cultures very different from our own, they can involve customs and ways of looking at the world which are not always easy for us to understand or relate to. Instead of giving up, or bypassing its importance, therefore, it is important to find help in understanding background information and cultural interpretation through commentaries. My favorite commentary is: <https://www.amazon.com/M-Eugene-Boring-Testament-Commentary/dp/B008UBGG3G>

Such knowledge can help us broaden our scope of understanding about theological issues, cultures and meaning. For example, cultural diversity helps us gain perspective on new ways of viewing the world—reminding us that our viewpoint is

itself relative and highly conditioned by many temporary factors, including the customs and conventions of our particular society and our time in history. We become often, not so bound by our present and are more open to the future and its possibilities. Discovering the Bible can be very eye opening!

The Bible is a blend of many different kinds of truth and levels of meaning; actual events and their interpretation, legend, myths and poetry. This doesn't always make it easy to understand, but it does offer more excitement and mystery—truths at the boundaries of human comprehension. We are drawn through surface and literalistic understandings toward more fundamental meaning. Understanding the Bible, its history, culture, and times can help us also appreciate inter-religious thinking.

We need to remember that God cannot be held by any words. There is still so much to learn. The words always point beyond the stories they tell. The Bible does this often using metaphor and imagery, by gaps and surprises in the stories, by stressing judgment in one place and mercy in another. Our human thoughts about God and the significance of life are bound by our limited, cultural and subjective knowledge. But the Bible is a living document that will not let us alone in striving to reveal new knowledge to us through the Holy Spirit.

So, keep being curious about our wonderful historical book. May we pray for an open mind when we read it, and a desire to be surprised! Our Bible is not only a historical document, but is a living document that is sacred and where the Holy Spirit continues to challenge our lives in ways we can not imagine.