



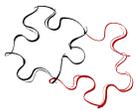
June 10, 2007

Isn't That Puzzling ?

I like jigsaw puzzles and really have enjoyed them over the years. As a matter of fact, one way to tell that I am severely stressed is when I am putting puzzles together one after another. This is very relaxing and the challenge to figure out the intricate patterns of shapes and colors is always one that I find very engaging. I find that trying to figure out the Bible is a lot like putting a puzzle together and I will discuss those similarities.



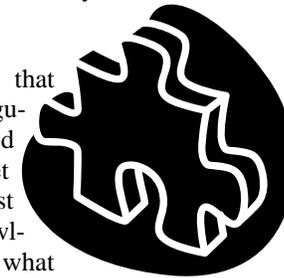
First of all, the Bible, contrary to what some might say, does not require outside assistance or influences to read and understand it. We will talk about the role of teachers and others who can help later but there is no "special" assistance or training needed. One does not have to hold university degrees or professional status in any trade. The Bible is available to anyone who will exercise some diligence and persevere. My favorite puzzles are those with at least 1000 pieces. The Bible has 1,189 chapters. When we open the box and see all those pieces lying inside we do not despair and begin to grow fearful. We begin to evaluate the pieces and look for patterns, edges and colors so that we can begin to organize the work ahead. In the same way we can take a look at the Bible, evaluate the pieces (books) and then look for patterns and things that match (contexts). Paul told Timothy, "**Till I come, give attendance to reading ...**" (1Tm:4:13). Daily reading of the scriptures will cause the scriptures to yield to us the things that we search for in trying to understand what God wants us to do. We will begin to understand how the various books fit together and how they complement each other just as the puzzle pieces do for each other.



One of the first things that we do when starting a puzzle is identify the border. This tells us where the limits are and assures us that in spite of the appearance of an insurmountable number of pieces, there is an end to the scope of the puzzle. We find that the puzzle will fit on a tabletop, not stretch endlessly a half mile down the road. The Bible has limits as well. As we read we will find that there are distinct periods of time that are characterized by how God deals with mankind. We will find that there are limits to what God will and will not do for us. We will find that there limits and requirements for what God indicates is acceptable. We would not expect the pieces of the puzzle to wander outside the borders of the picture area. In a similar fashion, we cannot make passages mean things that are outside the realm of the context of a book or chapter within that book. Each piece of a puzzle has a unique shape. That shape will fit in only one space. Forcing it to fit anywhere else will damage it and destroy the harmony of the puzzle. The end result of that will be a flawed image of the subject. Failing to recognize this about the Bible will cause us to have a

flawed view of the scriptures. Each piece of a puzzle conveys information that is part of a wider pattern. That pattern forms the resultant picture when all parts are assembled.. When the Bible is understood contextually, an accurate image of what God wants us to know is formed.

There are others that formed clubs that meet regularly and other resources dedicated there are groups that meet to time to further their knowledge and better understanding of what God's will is. We refer to these groups as congregations. We find that when faced with a very large puzzle it is fun, and more enjoyable to have some help with it. As we meet with other Christians we find



also enjoy puzzles and have even regularly. There are magazines, books to the puzzle aficionado. Similarly regularly to discuss the Bible and in it. These groups meet from time edge of the scriptures and come to a God's will is. We refer to these groups as congregations. We find that when faced with a very large puzzle it is fun, and more enjoyable to have some help with it. As we meet with other Christians we find



that our searching of the scriptures is more fruitful, rewarding and enjoyable. We also find that we are blessed by God as we do this. Christ stated, "**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.**" (Matt 18.20). We also find encouragement and warnings against neglecting this gathering together (Heb 10.24-25).

We talked about the border of the puzzle and the unique shapes of the pieces. We understand the importance of staying within the boundaries of the picture area and the harmony of the patterns that form the image. We know our interest is piqued when we open a puzzle box for the first time. But then, we may be overwhelmed with those 1000 pieces if all we have done is 25 up to this point. So where do we begin. As we open the pages of the Bible for the first time, or the thousandth time, with the intent to study earnestly, we may be overwhelmed. How do we start? Where should we begin? Next week we will talk about this as we discuss how to understand the Bible.