

What do we do if we don't understand something in the Bible?

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2. Secondly, what sort of writing is it, its **genre**? The passage generally seems to be straight narrative, so its meaning should be straight forward. But these two verses are different. Jesus' words here seem to have a double meaning – a surface meaning and something that is more significant and fundamental that we have to dig deeper to understand.
3. Thirdly, we need to look at the **context**.
  - a. In the **Bible**
    - i. **Immediate** – Jesus' disciples were afraid to go back to Jerusalem. Jesus was addressing their fears.
    - ii. **Wider** – Does Jesus say anything like this somewhere else?
    - iii. **Wider still** – How does it fit in with Jesus' whole purpose and ministry?
  - b. In the **culture**. How would it have been understood by the people that Jesus was talking to? Is there something that we might miss because of our different time and culture?
4. Fourthly, how have **Bible scholars** over time understood it?

Perhaps a clue is found in a similar passage in John chapter 9, verses 4 and 5

<sup>4</sup> As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' (John 9:4,5)

The context in chapter 9, is Jesus healing a blind man, so in chapter 11, it would seem that the meaning is more general than just addressing the disciples' fears about travelling back to Judea. Also, in chapter 9, Jesus is saying that the daylight hours are for working, doing God's work.

So now, looking at chapter 11, verse 9 again

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the day-time will not stumble, for they see by this world's light.'

"Twelve hours of daylight"? Apparently, they divided daylight into twelve equal "hours", whereas for us an hour is 60 minutes.<sup>2</sup> Well, that's something interesting about the culture, but it doesn't shed any extra light on what Jesus means.

Lastly, I have two Bible commentaries at home. They go through the whole Bible explaining each verse or section. But, now-a-days, I can look up the meaning of a particular verse at the Bible Hub, and have access to thirteen Bible commentaries.<sup>3</sup> That's equivalent to a pile of books over a metre high. So now, putting it all together, the meaning seems to be much clearer.

"His hour" (here the end of the day), when he would give his life on the cross, had not yet come. "His hour" is a recurring theme in John's Gospel.<sup>4</sup> So, in the same way that it is safe for people to walk in natural daylight hours, before the sun sets, it

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