

Three Periods Of Bible History



The Patriarchal Age

The Mosaic Age

The Gospel Age



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

Three Periods Of Bible History

Learn the differences between the patriarchal, mosaic, and Christian periods of Bible history and how each one is relevant to your life today

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Three Periods Of Bible History

2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Each individual has personal responsibility to study the word of God – and to be diligent in coming to accurate conclusions based on the things that are written. To rightly divide the Scriptures is to accurately handle it. This passage, then, implies that there is a right way and a wrong way to interpret the Bible text. For, if there was no wrong way to interpret what the Bible says, you would not need to exercise diligence in “rightly dividing” it.

2 Peter 3:16 demonstrates that it is possible to misinterpret and misapply the teachings of the Scriptures. Specifically talking about the writings of the apostle Paul, Peter says that “untaught and unstable people twist” his writings “to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” Therefore, since we can be guilty of twisting and perverting the way of truth, our desire ought to be to diligently and accurately understand and apply God’s word so that we never force it to teach things God never intended for it to teach.

Now, one of the essential elements involved in rightly dividing/handling the word of truth is recognizing the distinctions between the various periods of Bible history. There are three periods (commonly called “dispensations”) of Bible history – as related to the way in which God revealed His will to those who were living and the laws that people lived under. These three periods are: The Patriarchal Age, the Mosaic Age, and the Gospel Age. Every

part of the Bible story falls under one of these three periods of time.

Why is it important to observe these distinctions? Because of the importance of rightly dividing the word of truth and the dangers of twisting the Scriptures! If we are not diligent to observe these distinctions, we will misapply many teachings of the Scriptures. For instance, many people today (who live during the Gospel Age) look to the Old Testament Scriptures (especially to the Mosaic Age) and apply those instructions in inaccurate ways. An example of this is found whenever individuals look to the Old Testament to find authority for the use of instrumental music in worship. Another example is when individuals look to be saved in the same way as those who lived under the Law of Moses (i.e. the thief on the cross). Or, some folks misunderstand the Bible’s teachings concerning the “last days” by failing to see the connection between the “last days” and the Gospel Age.

While I could list other examples of the misunderstandings that result from failing to make the proper distinctions in these periods of Bible history, these will suffice to make the point. The focus of this lesson is to help you understand the three periods of Bible history and then to help you rightly divide the word of truth using this essential information.

The Patriarchal Age

The first period of Bible history is the Patriarchal Age. The term “Patriarchal Age” simply has reference to the fact that God primarily revealed His will directly to the patriarchs (heads of the households) during this time. Now, consider some important information about the Patriarchal Age with me.

Time period

The Patriarchal Age began in Genesis 1-2 when God created mankind and gave Him a law to abide by. This time continued until the giving of the Law of Moses around the time of Exodus 20.

Though the beginning and the end of this age can be easily identified in the way we've just considered, dating this period of time is not as easy. It is approximated that this period of time lasted for about 2,500 years.

How God revealed His will during this period

Central to each one of these three periods of time is a proper understanding of how it was that God revealed His will to mankind. During this first period of time, the Bible teaches that God primarily communicated His will to the heads of the households (i.e. to the patriarchs of the families). Hence the term "Patriarchal Age."

Before moving to demonstrate some things related to the revelation of God's will to the patriarchs of the families, we should first understand that those who were living during this time were under law – just not under written law. For instance, consider Genesis 9:1-7.

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it.'"

This passage records the commandments that were given to Noah after the flood. Notice a few of the specific things he was instructed. (1) He was told not to eat blood. (2) He was told not to commit murder. (3) He was told to be fruitful and multiply to fill the earth.

As you consider the instructions God gave to Noah, ask, "Was Noah under law?" Of course he

was! There were instructions from the Almighty God. These were not mere suggestions as to how Noah was expected to live his life. Therefore, we can absolutely conclude that there was law for people to abide by at this time – and that these laws were revealed to the patriarchs of the families.

Now, consider some examples of God revealing His laws to the patriarchs. (1) God revealed His will to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" This was the law that Adam and Eve were expected to abide by during their time in the Garden of Eden. They were commanded not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they violated this law, God told them that there would be the consequence of death experienced in the day they violated the law! When they violated the law (in Genesis 3:1-6), not only did they die spiritually that very day – but they also were given other physical punishments (see Genesis 3:14-24).

(2) God revealed His will to Noah concerning the construction of the ark in Genesis 6:12-21. You can read this entire passage to see God's instructions to Noah to make "an ark of gopherwood" (vs. 14). Prior to giving Noah all of the dimensions and specifications about how He wanted Noah to construct the ark, God said, "And this is how you shall make it" (vs. 15). Then, verse 22 states the following: "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did." Notice carefully that what God spoke to Noah were the commandments of God and that Noah was under the obligation of being obedient to these commandments.

(3) God revealed His will to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (also see Genesis 15). "Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" God gave Abraham very specific promises and also instructed Abraham (Abram at that time) to leave his homeland

in order to go to the land that his descendants would possess. In making this covenant with Abraham, God gave him the three main promises of his descendants becoming a great nation, his descendants inheriting the land of Canaan, and all the nations of the earth being blessed through his Seed.

Certainly, these are only three examples of many that could be given to illustrate how God revealed His will to the Patriarchs during this period of time. Other examples include God's command to Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar (Genesis 22:2), God instructions to Isaac concerning the covenant He had previously made to Abraham (Genesis 26:1-5), and God's instructions to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3).

Temporary in nature

As you consider these examples that illustrate the way in which God primarily communicated His will to people during this period of time, you must understand that it was temporary in nature. God continued to reveal His will in this way until the Law of Moses came into effect (which was revealed beginning in Exodus 20). At that time, the nation of Israel had a new (written) law to abide by. The period of the Patriarchal Age had, thus, passed and was no longer in effect.

The Law of Moses was added "because of transgression" (Galatians 3:19) – thereby making the laws involved in the Patriarchal Age of no effect for those who would be living during the Mosaic Age. Certainly, then, the laws and commandments given under the Patriarchal Age are not binding upon mankind today. For instance, we are not under the obligation to build an ark out of gopherwood because there is a command to do such in Genesis 6:14. We also are not under the obligation to leave our homelands in order to go to the land of Canaan because there is a command to do such in Genesis 12:1-3. This period of time has ended – as it has fulfilled its God-given purpose.

Relevance today

Now that we have established some basic facts about this first period of Bible history, we need to consider what (if any) relevance the Patriarchal

Age has for our lives today (since we do not live during this period). Does studying Genesis 1 – Exodus 20 have any benefit to our lives (besides learning lessons about history)?

First, you must (again) realize that the instructions given during this period of time are *not* binding today. Therefore, our study of this period must *not* be done in such a way so as to find binding instructions and commandments that we are under obligation to obey. Also, our study in this part of Scripture must *not* be to find authority for religious practices that are applicable today.

While this section of Scripture is not to be used in finding commands and authority that is applicable today, we can still greatly benefit from a study of this part of the Scriptures. Namely, the Biblical record of this period of time has been preserved for us by God in order that we might learn from it. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." There are many things that are profitable for our study that occurred during this period of time. For instance, we learn about the origin of this world, the origin of mankind, the origin of marriage, and the origin of sin. We also find the first references to God's eternal plan of redemption that He would carry out through Jesus Christ to save mankind from his sin. We also have wonderful lessons about obedience (i.e. Noah and Abraham), along with lessons about disobedience (i.e. Eve and Cain). Then, we learn many wonderful things about God – including His eternal nature, His great power, His faithfulness, etc.

Certainly, there are many ways we can benefit from studying the Biblical record of this period of time. In fact, the New Testament Scriptures even make numerous references to this period of time in order to demonstrate truths that we must abide by today – see Hebrews 11, Romans 4, James 2, and 1 John 3 as examples.

The Mosaic Age

The second period of Bible history is the Mosaic Age. The term “Mosaic Age” simply has reference to the fact that God revealed His will to Moses and gave the Israelites the written law (known as the Law of Moses). Now, consider some important information about the Mosaic Age with me.

Time period

The Mosaic Age began around the time of Exodus 20 (when God began revealing His law to Moses). Specifically notice Exodus 24:7-8 as Moses read the law to the people and the people entered into this covenant with God. “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.’”

The Mosaic Age lasted for approximately 1,500 years. It is believed to have been around 1,446-1,440 B.C. whenever Moses received the law from God. Then, this period continued until the time of the gospel (which came into effect in Acts chapter 2 – in approximately 33 A.D.).

How God revealed His will during this period

The way in which God revealed His law during this period of time was now different than the way God revealed His law during the Patriarchal Age. As we have seen, previously God had revealed His law to the individual heads of the households. However, God had now (during this period) revealed one law that was in effect for the entire nation of Israel.

Exodus chapter 20 is the first time any of this law is revealed. At this time, Moses had went up to a mountain in Sinai and received the law from God. Then, whenever Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, the people entered into a covenant with the Lord – saying that they would be

obedient to the law that had just been given to them (Exodus 24:1-8).

Though the law and commandments were not entirely revealed to Israel at that time, the foundational principles had been. You can continue to read Exodus 20-40, the book of Leviticus, the book of Numbers, and the book of Deuteronomy to read all of the laws that God gave for the Israelites to abide by. As you do, you notice the “Ten Commandments” that were the foundation of all the laws God revealed, laws concerning the construction of the tabernacle and the priestly garments, laws concerning the conduct of the priests and the tabernacle service, laws concerning sacrifices, laws concerning moral conduct, laws concerning personal property, laws concerning conduct with others, etc. As these laws were given, they were written down and preserved for the nation of Israel to follow throughout their history (unlike the laws that were in effect during the Patriarchal Age).

Please notice that this law was applicable to the nation of Israel (the descendants of Abraham). These laws were not given to govern the conduct of all the people throughout the world at that time (nor does the Bible story focus on the Gentile world in the Old Testament – except in certain points that are relevant to the story of redemption God is telling through the nation of Israel). While we do not have every answer to the questions we have concerning the Gentiles who were living at that time, Romans chapter 2 helps us understand that they had a natural law – and that they were responsible to God for how they kept that law, just as the Jews were responsible to God for how they kept the Law of Moses. Still, please recognize that this study is a study of the “Three Periods Of Bible History.” And, in the Old Testament, the period that is described is relevant to the Jewish people and the Law of Moses.

Temporary in nature

As you read all of these laws and the events that transpire throughout the pages of the Old Testament, you must recognize that they (the Israelites) were living under a system that was given to them for a law – and that was designed to be a temporary system. When God gave Moses the Law

to give to the people, God did not design it to be a permanent law for all people of all time to live by!

For instance, as the apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians, he was addressing individuals who had become Christians (during the Gospel Age) but were still trying to follow and bind the Law of Moses. While there are a number of useful passages from the book of Galatians that are relevant to our study, I want you to notice Galatians 3:19-25 particularly: “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Notice that this law was added “because of sin” – and gave the Israelites one set of laws they were to abide by. Still, the Law of Moses was not intended to be a permanent system. The law was only intended to be in effect “*till*” the Seed should come. This Seed was Jesus Christ. For, it was through Jesus Christ that the “Gospel Age” would come into effect. Whenever Jesus Christ came and fulfilled the Law of Moses and the Prophets, He established His new law and took away the old law.

Furthermore, notice that Paul says that life was not given through the Law of Moses. If it could have given spiritual life to those who had sinned against God (violated His law), righteousness would have come by the Law. Yet, although the Law had a system in place for animal sacrifices, the Law of Moses could not (of itself) bring about forgiveness. Hebrews 10:4 says that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” The only way God could forgive sins under the Law of Moses was because of His knowledge that Jesus

Christ would shed His blood for the remission of sins (Romans 3:25-26).

The Law was simply intended to be a “tutor” (“guardian,” ESV) to bring the Jewish people to faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, prophecies and promises were made concerning the Savior (Messiah) God would send into this world in order to save people from their sins, establish a new covenant, and establish His kingdom that would stand forever. Therefore, those who were devoutly studying and following the ways of the Law of Moses *should* have been ready to receive Jesus Christ, follow His new law, and be part of His kingdom whenever the time came. Unfortunately, many of them were not willing to do this – as they rejected Jesus, the gospel, and His kingdom.

Specifically, please notice that prophecy had been made concerning a new covenant being established to replace the former covenant (the Law of Moses). Hebrews 8:6-13 says (in referencing the prophecy made in Jeremiah 31:31-34), “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Notice that this new covenant is clearly identified as being the “better covenant” that is established on “better promises” – in comparison with the old covenant (the Law of Moses). The first covenant (Law of Moses) is said not to have been faultless (for, if it had been, then there would have been no need for a new covenant). Under this “new covenant,” God would offer the forgiveness of sins – forgiveness that was found through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And, verse 13 clearly indicates that this old covenant (at the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy) was being made “obsolete” and was “ready to vanish away.”

Not only does the Bible say that the old covenant was becoming obsolete and ready to vanish away; but, the Bible teaches that it has been taken out of the way and replaced with a new covenant! Colossians 2:14 says, “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The “handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us” is the Law of Moses! The Law of Moses was “against” us in that it kept us separated from God, offering no way of forgiveness through the Law itself (see also Ephesians 2:15). This Law was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ. At this point, Christ’s law would soon come into effect – and the Law of Moses would no longer be in effect!

Furthermore, you can observe the temporary nature of the Law of Moses in that those who were Christians (living during the Gospel Age) and attempting to live under the Law of Moses (rather than the law of Christ) were rebuked for their unfaithfulness. For instance, in Galatians 5:1-4, Paul rebukes those who were leaving the “liberty” offered by Jesus Christ and becoming “entangled again with a yoke of bondage” by trying to follow the Law of Moses. Paul states that such a one would be under the obligation to “keep the whole law.” Then, he states, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Now, if the Law of Moses is still in effect today, why would there be such a serious warning about leaving the freedom from sin that is found through Jesus Christ in order to go back and live

under the Law of Moses? Clearly, the time for the Law of Moses had passed and it had been replaced with Christ’s new and better law!

Relevance today

Now that we have established some basic facts about this second period of Bible history, we need to consider what (if any) relevance the Mosaic Age has in our lives today (since we do not live during this period). Does studying the Old Testament have any benefit to our lives (besides learning lessons about history)?

Again, as was demonstrated regarding the Patriarchal Age, we must not study this portion of the Scriptures in order to find laws that are binding on mankind today – or to find authority for the things that are to be done today. Remember, the Law of Moses (the entire system that was given to the Israelites) was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ and has been replaced with a new and better law! Therefore, why should you even desire to go back and live according to the things given in the Law of Moses?

However, just as we saw with regard to the Patriarchal Age, the things that are recorded in the Bible throughout the Mosaic Age have been preserved by God for a purpose. As Romans 15:4 says, these things are given for our learning. Just as we can learn many things from the time of the Patriarchal Age, we can learn many things from the period of the Mosaic Age. And, once again, the New Testament even points to examples of individuals who lived during this time to help Christians live their lives in a way that is pleasing to God – by learning from their examples, both positive and negative (see Hebrews 11 and 1 Corinthians 10).

The Gospel Age

The third period of Bible history is the Gospel Age. The term “Gospel Age” simply has reference to the fact that God has revealed His law in the gospel of Jesus Christ and people today are expected to live their lives according to these instructions. Now,

consider some important information about the Gospel Age with me.

Time period

The Gospel Age began in Acts chapter 2, on the Day of Pentecost. This chapter of the Bible reveals the fulfillment of prophecies that pointed to the time when God's kingdom would be established and the gospel's message (the message of the new covenant) would be proclaimed.

This age began in Acts chapter 2 (approximately 33 A.D.) and was in effect throughout the remainder of the New Testament. In fact, this age is still ongoing. Therefore, this period of time has lasted (as of my writing) just short of 2,000 years – and will continue as long as this earth will exist, until the return of Jesus Christ!

Now, as we shift our focus from the old law (the Law of Moses) to the new law (the Law of Christ), I want to offer a few comments concerning the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). These books record the events surrounding the life and death of Jesus Christ. And, as you read these very critical books, you need to appreciate that they record events that transpire during the time the Law of Moses was in effect. However, Jesus was also working to lay the foundations for His new law that would come into effect in Acts chapter 2, while working to fulfill the old law. So, as you study these books, you will need to be very diligent in understanding which things pertain to the Mosaic Age and which things pertain to the Gospel Age.

How God revealed His will during this period

Before we consider how God has revealed His will during this period of time, please take special care to notice the fact that God *has* revealed a new law and that there *is* a law in effect today! It is the Law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2 refers to this simply by those words, encouraging us to “fulfill the law of Christ.” James 1:25 makes reference to the “perfect law of liberty.” Now, this law is perfect – and it is a law. Also, it is a law of liberty (freedom). Though this is

not freedom to live in any way you desire (as if living without law), it is freedom from sin through Jesus Christ! Furthermore, those who follow Jesus Christ are exhorted to live according to the faith of the gospel (see Philippians 1:27 and Colossians 1:23).

This law of Christ contains doctrine that we are told we must abide in. 2 John 1:9-11 says, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Then, Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18-19 plainly teaches against making changes to this gospel message!

This law of Christ, then, with all of its doctrines, commandments, examples, and necessary inferences form a pattern for mankind to live their lives by today. In 2 Timothy 1:13, Paul instructed, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words.” Also, since this new law of Christ represents a pattern that we must live our lives by today, failing to be obedient to the commandments of God contained therein results in eternal punishment (see 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and Matthew 7:21-23).

Now that you recognize that there is a law that has been given to govern our conduct today, you need to consider how God has revealed this law – and where you can find it. First, understand that God has spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-3 says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

As I have briefly discussed already, whenever Jesus lived (during the time recorded by the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), He lived under the Law of Moses. As He lived, He fulfilled the prophecies that had been made throughout the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures

(Matthew 5:17-18). And, He is the only one who has ever reached an age of moral and personal accountability who did not sin (see Hebrews 4:15). Then, as He lived, He was also teaching concerning His new law that would soon come into effect. For instance, read Matthew chapters 5-7 and observe the number of times Christ contrasts the teachings of the Law of Moses (or one of man's ideas) with His new law. Remember, it was through His death that the old law (Law of Moses) was nullified and the new law came into effect (see Colossians 2:14 and Hebrews 9:16-22).

In addition to Jesus revealing this new law while He lived upon the earth, this new law continued to be revealed after Jesus ascended into Heaven – through the Holy Spirit. This was according to what Jesus had promised His apostles. For instance, Jesus told His apostles, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). Similarly, John 16:13 says, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

Notice carefully that the Holy Spirit would be bringing these individuals (the apostles) into an understanding of God's way of truth. He would not be revealing a different law than the one Jesus had revealed. Instead, both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit were working to make the new law of God known to the people! Therefore, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 states that the Spirit of God knows the things that are in the mind of God – even the deep things of God. Then, whenever we read the things that the Spirit has revealed, we can have “the mind of Christ” (verse 16)!

How can we learn the message that the Holy Spirit has revealed? Look at 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” By reading the things written in the pages of God's word, we can learn this God-given message. Specifically, by reading the things written in the New

Testament, we can learn about the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ and His new law – as it has been made known “by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:3-5).

It was the work of the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles and prophets into all truth. Whenever they wrote under the guidance of the Spirit, they revealed the new covenant. Therefore, not only are the words of Jesus Christ fully authoritative (John 12:48); but, even the words written by these men under inspiration of the Holy Spirit are authoritative. For instance, Paul makes the statement (in 1 Corinthians 14:37) that the things he wrote “are the commandments of the Lord.”

Temporarily, God also gave some the ability to possess certain miraculous gifts of the Spirit which were to demonstrate that what was being taught was from God (see Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:1-4). These miraculous gifts are identified in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. However, please understand that these gifts were necessary at that time (during the period of time the New Testament was being written). However, God said that these miraculous gifts of the Spirit were only intended to be temporary – and they would vanish away whenever “that which is perfect has come” (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-12). That which is perfect is the completed revelation of God's will (which we now have in the pages of the New Testament). Therefore, we can now “understand what the will of the Lord is” whenever we read that message which has been written (see Ephesians 3:3-5 and Ephesians 5:17)!

In effect during the last days

This new law of Christ came into effect on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 – and continues through today! The Scriptures clearly identify these as the “last days.” As we have already seen, Hebrews 1:2 says that God “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” Then, on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter declared that the events that were transpiring were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, which began: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God...” (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-32).

These are the “last days” because this is the last period of time (the last dispensation of time) prior to the end of this world. Though there have been two other periods of time in Bible history (the Patriarchal Age and the Mosaic Age), there will not be another period of time on this earth after the Gospel Age! At the conclusion of the Gospel Age, Jesus Christ will return and this earth will be destroyed (see 2 Peter 3:10-14). There will not be any modern-day revelations from God. Instead, Jude 1:3 says that the faith (the faith of the gospel) “was once for all delivered to the saints.” This is the law that will continue to be in effect until Jesus Christ returns and eternity begins!

Relevance today

Although the laws revealed during the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages fail to qualify as the law we live under today, the law of Christ that has been revealed for the Gospel Age is the law we live under today. God has not given any other law for mankind to live by today – and His law is universally applicable for all mankind (regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc.)!

Whenever Jesus Christ returns and you stand before Him in final Judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10), you will be judged according to the things written in the New Testament (see John 12:48; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:11-15). Therefore, you must dedicate your life to being obedient to this law. For, Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). However, those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction when He comes (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Given that you now live under the new law of Jesus Christ (revealed throughout the pages of the New Testament), you must dedicate yourself to diligently studying and applying its message. You must look to it for instruction in doctrine, for instructions about how to be saved, for instructions about how to worship God acceptably, for instructions about how God wants you to live, and for instructions in every area of your life. You must determine that everything you do will be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (by His authority, Colossians 3:17).

Conclusion

One day, you will be judged by God’s word (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15). Therefore, you need to live your life according to God’s instructions. But, in order to live your life according to God’s instructions, you need to know what law you are living under.

I hope that this study has helped you properly understand that there are three periods of Bible history related to how God has revealed His will. Today, we all live under the law of Christ that is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. As you study the Bible, then, it is important for you to properly distinguish between these three periods so that you can rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) and live your life according to God’s will for you today!

Study Questions

What instruction is given in 2 Timothy 2:15 – and how does it apply to this study?

1. The Patriarchal Age

What is the time period for the Patriarchal Age?

Did God have a law during this time? If so, how did He reveal His will during this period? Provide some examples.

Discuss the temporary nature of this period.

What relevance does this time period have today?

2. The Mosaic Age

What is the time period for the Mosaic Age?

How did God reveal His law during this time? How was this different than under the Patriarchal Age?

Was the Mosaic Law intended to be permanent? Provide evidence to support your answer.

What relevance does this time period have today?

3. The Gospel Age

What is the time period for the Gospel Age?

Is there a law in effect during this period? If so, how did God reveal His law during this time?

When did the “last days” begin? What is the connection between the “last days” and the Gospel Age?

What relevance does this time period have today?