

Introduction

God never changes in His person, principles, and promises (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8), but He does change in His dealings with man. All scripture is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), but in order to gain the profit from God's word that He has placed in it for us, we must study it His way (2 Tim. 2:15).

1. What we are to do – “Study”
2. Why we are to do it – “to shew thyself approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed”
3. How we are to do it – “rightly dividing the word of truth”

All the Bible is “the word of truth,” but we must recognize and consistently maintain the divisions that God put in His word if we are going to understand it. What was truth for Israel under the law may not be truth for the Body of Christ under grace. This is the dispensational approach to Bible study.

A “dispensation” (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25) is basically a dealing out, distribution, or dispensing of something. It is an administration. Dispensations are not periods of time. Ages are periods of time, but dispensations operate within ages. Each dispensation revealed in scripture is marked by five things:

- 1) Divine revelation (which bring clear changes in God's dealings with men)
- 2) Human spokesman (such as Moses for the Law and Paul for the Mystery)
- 3) Human responsibility (testing)
- 4) Human failure (every dispensation ends in apostasy except the last one, Eph. 1:10)
- 5) Divine judgment

The Main Division

The main division in the Bible concerns God's twofold purpose, which is implied in the very first verse (Gen. 1:1).

- 1) **Heaven** - The Body of Christ was planned before the foundation of the world but was hid in God (Eph. 3:9) and **kept secret since the world** began (Rom. 16:25) until Christ from heaven revealed it through Paul. The Body of Christ will reign with Christ in heavenly places throughout the ages to come (Eph. 2:6-7).
- 2) **Earth** - Israel as a kingdom of priests ruling over the Gentile nations is the subject of prophecy. The kingdom that God will establish on the earth has been **spoken of by the prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:21).

The major theme of the Bible is the King and His Kingdom:

- OT - promised and prophesied
- Gospels - proclaimed and rejected
- Acts - offered and rejected (transition)
- Pauline epistles - postponed (mystery)
- Hebrew epistles - proclamation resumed
- Revelation – established

Ephesians 2

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in **time past** Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

7 That in the **ages to come** he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 2 the apostle Paul shows us how to rightly divide the word of truth.

Time Past (2:11-12)

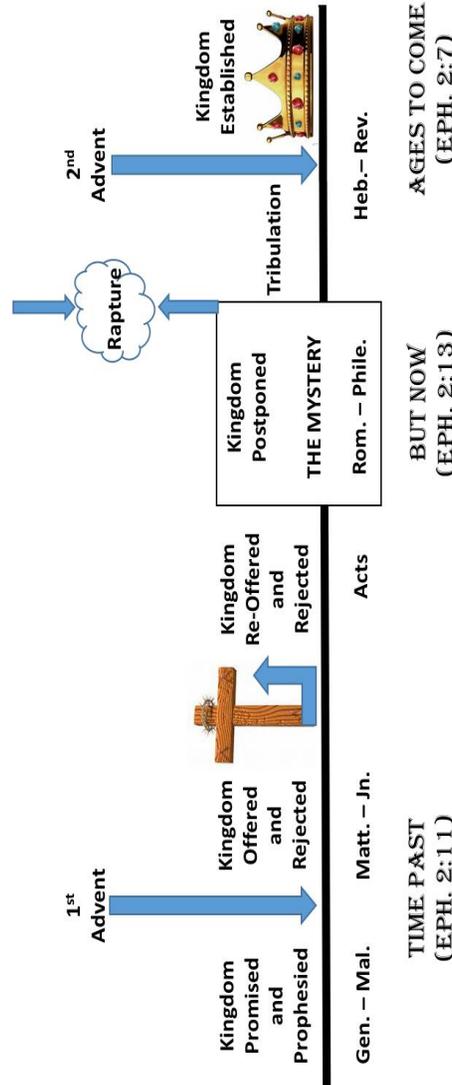
The terms “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” identify a basic physical, racial, and social distinction; one that was in the flesh and made by hands. In this time past status, the Gentiles were also spiritually alienated from God and thus said to be “without Christ.” That was their condition because they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” and “strangers from the covenants of promise.” So the physical distinction only pointed to the more important spiritual alienation the Gentile masses occupied in time past. Gentiles could come to God, but they had to come through Israel (like Ruth). Gentiles were not blessed if they did not first bless the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:3). God gave circumcision to Abraham (Gen. 17) as a sign of the covenant He made with him and his seed after him. It was an outward sign of the spiritual privilege God had given to them and was a required mark of their identity and covenant privileges. It was the beginning of a middle wall of partition that God put up between Israel and the nations (Num. 23:9). When He revealed the law through Moses that wall was strongly reinforced (Deut. 4:5-8)! Therefore, whenever we see God making this distinction in the scripture, we know that we are not reading about this present age. Most Bible believing Christians understand that about the Old Testament, but few understand that is also the case with the Gospels and the early chapters of Acts (Rom. 15:8; Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24; Lk. 24:34; 24:47; Acts 1:6; 2:14, 22, 36; 3:19-26; 11:19).

But Now (2:13-18)

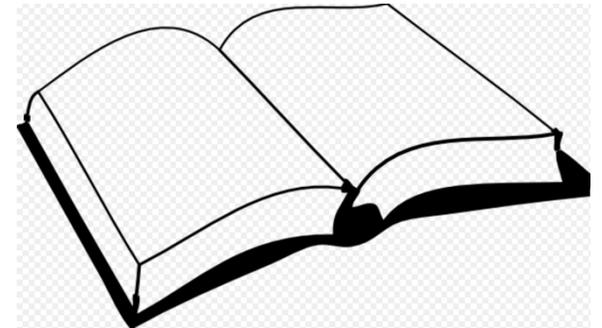
This is one of several significant “but now” passages in Paul’s epistles (Col. 1:24-26). The Body of Christ was a mystery (or, secret) that was first revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:1-12). Some try to use this passage to teach that the Body of Christ began historically AT the cross. Not everything that Christ accomplished through His cross was revealed or carried out at that time. He destroyed Satan through His death and resurrection, but Satan is still loose and at work (Rom. 16:20). The Body of Christ is made possible “by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13) and “by the cross” (Eph. 2:16). But entrance into this Body is “by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6) and “by one Spirit” (Eph. 2:18; 1 Cor. 12:13). The main characteristic of the Body of Christ is that all believers are made to be “ONE NEW MAN”. There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Col. 3:11). We are not under the ordinances of the law (Col. 2:8-17). The only place in the Bible where we read about Jews and Gentiles being in one spiritual Body is in Paul’s epistles! It is in his epistles alone that we find the specific doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the church which is the Body of Christ.

Ages to Come (2:7)

After the present dispensation of the Mystery closes with the mystery of the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51), God will resume and fulfill the prophetic kingdom program of Israel (Hebrews through Revelation). The distinction between Israel and the Gentiles will once again be in place. The Body of Christ will reign in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6-7) while Israel reigns over the nations on the earth (Isa. 2:1-5).



Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth



Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

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