Basic Bible Comprehension

The Right Division of God's Word

A 12-Lesson Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®

Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

About This Series

Basic Bible Comprehension is Keith Blades' 12-lesson series dedicated to providing the understanding and appreciation you need to have for the issue of the right division of God's Word — II Timothy 2:15, rightly dividing the word of truth: recognizing the portion of God's Word that is dealing with us today, and dividing the Word amongst time past, but now, and what's to come. Keith shows that if we know Romans 9–11 and Ephesians 2–3 we know what rightly dividing means; shows how God's Word lays itself out in accordance with that right division into time past, but now and to come; gives painfully obvious examples of the critical need to rightly divide; shows Israel's program still in view in the gospel accounts and the continuation of God's program with Israel in the opening chapters of Acts; amplifies the uniqueness and specialness of Paul's apostleship; and closes on Satan's policy of evil against the right division of God's Word.

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Lesson Summaries

L1

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth *II Timothy 2:15–18; Ephesians 2–3: Paul, the Dispensation of Gentile Grace, Time Past and But Now*

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth (II Timothy 2:15)

- II Timothy 2:15 has an expression — "rightly dividing the word of truth" — that summarizes the most critical issue in properly handling God's Word; without it, God's Word isn't going to make the sense it ought to make
- God's got more than one program recorded in the Bible; it's all profitable and you need to learn it all, but not everything from Genesis through Revelation is about us as Christians today

Paul and the Dispensation of the Grace of God

- We're Gentiles; Ephesians 3:1 tells us Paul is the one God raised up and sent out with a message for us — the apostle of the Gentiles, a very distinct and special office (Romans 11:13)
- "The dispensation of the grace of God" has been in effect since God raised up Paul and is still in effect; Keith abbreviates it on the board as the dispensation of Gentile grace, without rewording it

Time Past, But Now, and Things to Come

- Paul uses three time expressions — time past, but now, and things to come — and rightly dividing recognizes the portion of God's word dealing with each

Time Past and But Now (Ephesians 2:11–16)

- In time past God still had a program, but it was with the circumcision — the seed of Abraham, the nation Israel; circumcision is the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and his seed (Genesis 17)
- The law contract functioned as the middle wall of partition; but now God has made Israel and the Gentiles one in their standing and is forming the one new man, the church, the body of Christ, which didn't exist in time past

L2

Israel's Program Interrupted, Not Canceled; the Mystery

Ephesians 2; Romans 9–11; Ephesians 3: What's Yet to Come and the Mystery Hid in God

Romans 9–11: To Whom Pertaineth

- In Romans 9, 10 and 11 Paul looks from the time past perspective and acknowledges that this dispensation of Gentile grace has interrupted God's program with Israel, which is not being fulfilled in it
- What's yet to come, after the dispensation of Gentile grace, is the resumption and fulfillment of God's program with Israel

Blindness in Part (Romans 11:25–28)

- God has blinded His nation, but "blindness in part" is temporary, "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in"; then God will resume and fulfill His program with Israel

How This Dispensation Starts and Ends; the Kingdom

- The dispensation of grace starts and ends the very same way: it started with the Lord unexpectedly coming back from heaven and raising up Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9, and ends by what we call the rapture of the church

The Mystery Hid in God (Ephesians 3)

- Paul describes this dispensation of Gentile grace as a mystery — something not known in time past; no one anticipated or expected it, because God didn't make it known
- The mystery was not hid in the scriptures but "hid in God" (Ephesians 3:9) — a new and different program, never prophesied or expected by anybody until God revealed it to the Apostle Paul

Rightly Dividing and the Layout of God's Word

- This dispensation of grace is not the subject matter of the Old Testament prophets, nor of the Lord's earthly ministry recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

L3

God's Word Laid Out: Prophetic and Mystery Messages

Genesis–Revelation; Luke 1:67ff; Romans 16:25; Leviticus 11 and I Timothy 4

Time Past, But Now, and To Come

- God's word is laid out in the order of time past, but now, and to come; things in effect in time past, and things still yet to come, aren't in effect today

Time Past: Genesis Through the Opening Chapters of Acts

- You're in time past in the Gospel accounts too: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are also Old Testament scriptures; the Lord's earthly ministry was under the law, and Jesus Christ was "a minister of the circumcision" (Romans 15:8)
- The first eight chapters of Acts, including the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, are still time past; charismatic gifts and Pentecostalism don't even pertain to this dispensation of Gentile grace

But Now and To Come: Romans Through Philemon, Hebrews Through Revelation

- The dispensation of Gentile grace gets underway with God raising up Paul — not a replacement for Judas, not aligned with the 12, but a brand new and different apostle; the mystery wasn't revealed until Acts 9
- Romans through Philemon is the portion of God's Word talking to you today; the Bible is all God's mail to His people, but not all of it has your name on it

— Romans through Philemon does

Two Programs, Two Messages; a First Example

- What was spoken by all His holy prophets since the world began (Luke 1:67ff) and what was kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25) can't be the same thing; the right division is the prophetic message and the mystery message
- You can be 100% scriptural and be dead wrong in God's sight: Leviticus 11's dietary commands were given to the children of Israel only, while in I Timothy 4 Paul says the Word of God sanctified them all — two different programs

L4 Scriptural but Not Dispensational: Painfully Obvious Examples

I Timothy 4; Galatians 4–6; Colossians 2; Romans 6:14; I Timothy 1: Meats, Circumcision, Holy Days, the Law

Being Scriptural Isn't Enough

- Failing to rightly divide is dangerous: a Christian can be dishonoring and disobeying the Lord Jesus Christ and grieving the Holy Spirit even while being scriptural
- Romans through Philemon is the portion dealing with us today; "Genesis through the book of Acts" records God's time past dealings with Israel, whose program isn't concluded; Hebrews through Revelation focus upon the Hebrew people through Peter, James, John and Jude

Meats: Leviticus 11 and I Timothy 4

- I Timothy 4 is the Holy Spirit speaking, not Paul's opinion; Paul's authority comes from God, who has changed the program — God didn't say Leviticus 11 to you

Doctrines of Devils and Satan's Policy of Evil

- Satan's policy of evil is after getting Christians to be biblical, scriptural, but not dispensational; more Christians try to please the Lord by following Israel's program than by acknowledging this dispensation of Gentile grace

Physical Circumcision: John 7 and Galatians 5

- Moses could never have told an Israelite circumcision would profit nothing; Galatians isn't to Israel — two different programs — and circumcision for religious purposes is disobedience to the dispensation of grace, where the issue is a new creation

Holy Days: Leviticus 23, Galatians 4 and Colossians 2

- There is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath; Colossians 2:17 says "Which are a shadow of things to come" — those shadows haven't had their fulfillment yet

The Whole Law: Romans 6:14 and I Timothy 1

- God dealt with Israel by the law, all of it headed up in the Ten Commandments, but not so in the dispensation of Gentile grace: "ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14) — grace is the key word

L5 That Blank Page Between Malachi and Matthew *Amos 8, Micah 5, Malachi 3: The 400-Year Silence and Israel's Program in the Gospels*

The Blank Page Is Not the Right Division

- Because of the editorial break the Bible publishers made, people think time past is Genesis through Malachi; but the things recorded in Matthew through John are still time past
- The right division of God's Word is dividing it into God's two programs: his prophesied program, in effect since the world began and focused on the nation of Israel, and his mystery program, kept secret since the world began and first revealed to Paul

A 400-Year Period of Silence

- The page represents about 400 years of silence between Malachi and John the Baptist; the famine "of hearing the words of the LORD" in Amos does not take away the written word, but no prophets would be functioning; in Micah, God would give Israel up
- In Malachi 3 God tells Israel to keep their ears open for the next time he speaks; the gospel accounts identify the messenger as John the Baptist — a prophesied messenger with a prophesied message, not a mystery message like Paul had to preach

The Climactic Stage Had Arrived

- What follows in Matthew through John is the resumption of God speaking to Israel; the gospel accounts, with the opening chapters of Acts, are about the climactic stage in God's program with Israel having arrived
- The Lord said and did what the prophets said he would, so he couldn't be saying things about the mystery of Christ; the day of Pentecost is not the birthday of the church, the body of Christ

Three Things in the Gospel Accounts

- Romans 15:8: Jesus Christ was "a minister of the circumcision" when he was here — he isn't that right now; anytime circumcision and uncircumcision are an issue, you're in time past

L6

A Minister of the Circumcision *Romans 15; Matthew 10 and 15; Mark 7; Luke 1: Not to the Gentiles*

Magnifying the Office: Moses and Paul

- Making an issue of Paul magnifies the office, not the man; Moses and Paul are the central individuals in God's twofold plan and purpose, and as God made a big issue of Moses to Israel, he makes a big issue of Paul to you

Romans 15:15–17: Your Minister

- Paul is the minister of Jesus Christ to you; the offering up of the Gentiles is what is going on now, not what was going on in time past

Romans 15:8–12: Confirming the Promises

- Before the Lord raised up Paul, everything in his ministry was as a minister of the circumcision; now he ministers to the Gentiles from heaven through Paul

Matthew 10: Not to the Gentiles

- The ministry of the Lord and the twelve excluded the Gentiles and even the Samaritans; a dispensation of Gentile grace cannot be in effect when the Gentiles are not dealt with
- The so-called great commissions cannot be fulfilled today because they don't pertain to today; the Lord advanced, but did not change, what he said in Matthew 10

The Second Issue: The Gospel Being Preached

- The message then was not the mystery of Christ or the gospel of the grace of God; the good news was that the time for the kingdom to be established was at hand — the gospel of the circumcision
- Gabriel's words in Luke 1 show the goal is not a dispensation of Gentile grace but the kingdom the Abrahamic covenant looks for; that message cannot be preached truthfully today, because God's program with Israel is set aside

L7

The Gospel of the Gospels: Kingdom at Hand *Luke 1, Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 12: Daniel's Time Schedule*

Luke 1: The Throne of His Father David

- Gabriel dealt with Mary about providing the physical flesh for the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant; the issue is the kingdom promised there, built upon the Abrahamic covenant — that is why he came

No Mystery There

- There is nothing in the gospel accounts about a mystery of Christ, Gentiles and Jews on the same level, a dispensation of Gentile grace, or one new man being formed

A Prophesied Messenger, a Prophesied Message

- When John came, the 400-year famine of hearing the word of God was broken; spoken of in Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3, he was a prophesied messenger with a prophesied message and could never say he preached the mystery of Christ
- The law and the prophets kept saying something is coming until John; John says it is at hand now — within your grasp and ready for possession or establishment

The Time Is Fulfilled: Daniel's Time Schedule

- The at hand concept is closely tied to a time schedule: Daniel 9 gave one determined against Israel and Jerusalem, comprising 490 years, and 483 would have gone by when the Messiah was cut off
- When the Lord began preaching, 98% of that time schedule had gone by; God interrupted the program when the last seven years, the day of the Lord's wrath, were ready to transpire, and stopped the schedule; it is not running in this dispensation of grace

The Wrath to Come and the Little Flock

- In Luke 12 the Lord speaks to the believing remnant: "Fear not, little flock"; their hope and promise was that kingdom, not going to heaven as your hope is today

L8

The Signs of the Kingdom *Matthew 24, Mark 16, Isaiah 35, Zechariah 13, Luke 18: The Gospel of the Kingdom Post-Cross*

Matthew 24: Through the Day of His Wrath

- A few days before the cross the Lord prepared the apostles and the remnant of Israel to go through that time; Matthew 24 has nothing to do with this dispensation of Gentile grace

The Message Didn't Change

- Once the Lord was crucified, rejected and departed, the message did not change: still the gospel of the kingdom, the same message John the Baptist began preaching and the Lord preached for three years

Mark 16: Believe and Be Baptized

- Peter, James and John were sent to water baptize as part of the program; Paul was not sent to water baptize (I Corinthians 1:17) — the distinctiveness of his ministry and its difference from the twelve

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

- Things don't change until the brand new Apostle Paul in Acts 9 — a change not anticipated or prophesied: the revelation of the mystery of Christ, which God kept secret since the world began
- Rightly dividing is not putting the division between Malachi 4 and Matthew 1; it is recognizing Romans through Philemon as the portion of God's word to us and about us in this dispensation of grace

Preaching and Showing the Glad Tidings

- He preached the glad tidings by his words and showed them by his miracles — physical healings and casting out demons that validated to Israel the kingdom of heaven really was at hand
- The signs in Mark 16, such as speaking in new tongues, are Israel's signs for that time; no such signs are carried out today, because the kingdom of heaven is not at hand today

L9

The Opening Chapters of Acts: Still Time Past *Acts 1:1–2:1; Matthew 16; Hebrews 2; Ezekiel 36: Israel's Program Continuing*

Still Time Past, Still Israel's Program

- What goes on in the opening chapters of Acts is the continuation of God's program with the nation Israel; in the gospel accounts and those opening chapters you are still in that time past program
- The great dispensational change takes place with the raising up of Paul in Acts 9 — not in Matthew 1, Acts 1, Acts 2, or any place before Paul comes along

Matthias, Not Paul, Replaced Judas

- Paul is a unique and distinct apostle — not numbered with the twelve, not a 13th apostle in that line, and not a circumcision apostle

Upon This Rock: the Remnant Church (Matthew 16)

- Because there is more than one church in the Bible, Paul speaks of the church which is his body; Israel's prophesied church is not a mystery church

Restore Again the Kingdom; Pentecost Fully Come

- The apostles were not confused about the program: the issue is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel — still the program then, not the program today; only the exact time had not been told them
- The two angels said they would see him come back in fulfillment of Zechariah 14; there is no pre-trib rapture for Peter, James and John — the rapture is part of the mystery revelation given to Paul
- When the day of Pentecost, a feast day on Israel's calendar, was fully come, what it foreshadowed in Israel's program was fully come; Peter will not say it is the birthday of the church, the body of Christ

L10

To Give Repentance to Israel *Acts 2–7; Joel 2: the Extension of Mercy and Forbearance*

The Day of Pentecost Fully Come

- The day of Pentecost is Israel's program advancing to the fully come status of the next event on the calendar set forth in Leviticus 23; the Feast of Tabernacles, the last feast, is the kingdom itself

"this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel"

- Peter does not say this is like that, or a mystery of Christ; he says this is that — and if it was spoken by any prophet before Paul came along, it is not the mystery of Christ
- The day of Pentecost is not the birthday of the church, the body of Christ, nor the beginning of the dispensation of grace; "the last days" means the end of something, not the beginning

Repent Ye Therefore: Acts 3 and Acts 5:31

- In Acts 3 Peter indicts the nation for the crime of rejecting their Messiah; what was spoken by all God's holy prophets since the world began cannot be the same as what God kept secret since the world began
- In Acts 5:31, "to give repentance to Israel" summarizes Acts 1 until you get to chapter 9: repentance, a change of mind, given to Israel before God has his day of wrath

Standing, Not Sitting — and Saul Raised Up

- Instead of the day of wrath beginning, the Lord Jesus Christ did something totally unexpected and unprophesied in Acts 9: he raised up his arch enemy, made him a brand new apostle and sent him out to the Gentiles
- From Acts 9 on to the end of Philemon you are in the dispensation of grace; your instructions, your promises and God's dealings with you are contained in Romans through Philemon

L11

Paul's Unique and Distinct Apostleship *Acts 1:15–26; Romans 15; Colossians 2; Galatians 2: Matthias and Paul*

Rightly Dividing: Prophecy and Mystery

- Rightly dividing the word of truth is not dividing the Bible into Old Testament and New Testament, but between God's prophecy program with Israel and the mystery program with the church, the body of Christ
- God's program with Israel is not over or canceled but temporarily suspended in and for this dispensation of grace, which will end by the rapture, the mystery coming of the Lord Jesus Christ only Paul speaks about

No Mistake in Acts 1: Matthias Replaces Judas

- No mistake is made: in the 40 days Jesus through the Holy Ghost gave the apostles commandments, and the bishopric being taken by another was one of the commands they were to fulfill
- Judas' replacement is a prophesied apostle, prophesied almost a thousand years earlier in Psalm 109; Paul is not a prophesied apostle

The Lord's Qualifications and the Casting of Lots

- Casting lots was a divinely appointed means of determining God's will in Israel's program, not in this dispensation of grace; Matthias being filled with

the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost seals and settles the matter

Romans 15: the Offering Up of the Gentiles

- Romans 15:8–12 gives time past and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; "the offering up of the Gentiles" is what God is doing today — prophecy, mystery, prophecy is how you rightly divide

Galatians 2: Two Separate Distinct Gospels

- Peter's apostleship was with the gospel of the circumcision and Paul's with the gospel of the uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7) — "two separate distinct gospels," not one gospel going to two different groups

L12

Satan's Policy: Keeping the Mystery a Mystery *I Corinthians 2; Colossians 2; Ephesians 3–4; II Timothy 2:15: Phase One*

Why Right Division Exposes the Adversary

- Satan understands who you are as a member of the body of Christ better than you do; his goal is to keep the mystery still a mystery to you

The Heavenly Places and the Mystery

- God has not just suspended Israel's program because he is frustrated with Israel (Romans 11); he set it aside because of the mystery of Christ, planned and purposed but kept secret since before the world began

The Hidden Wisdom of God (I Corinthians 2)

- The main reason for keeping the mystery a mystery is to keep it a secret from Satan; that is why the mystery is called the hidden wisdom of God

Phase One: Corrupting Your Understanding

- The policy of evil has at least three major phases; phase one, the primary phase, is to corrupt your understanding of what God is doing today — Satan only employs phases two and three if it doesn't work
- Satan knows the way to thwart Ephesians 3:10 is to hinder Ephesians 3:9; corruptive doctrines get believers to think there is no difference between Paul's apostleship and that of the twelve
- Contrary doctrines are designed to deceive, and the Bible is used to produce them; the rudiments of the world means bringing things out of God's program with Israel into today

Return to II Timothy 2:15

- The portion of God's word expressly to you and about you today is the epistles of the Apostle Paul; Hebrews and the book of the Revelation pertain to the resumption of God's program with Israel

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

Time Past, But Now, and To Come

Paul uses three time expressions — time past, but now, and things to come — and God's Word, laid out in the order in which his plan and purpose is running, naturally divides itself into time past, but now, and to come. Time past and to come are God's program with Israel and the subject matter of the prophets; but now is the mystery of Christ, the dispensation of Gentile grace, the subject matter of Paul's epistles, Romans through Philemon.

Israel's Program vs. This Dispensation of Grace

This dispensation of Gentile grace has interrupted God's program with Israel; that program is in abeyance, on hold, but it hasn't been canceled. God's program with Israel is not being fulfilled in this dispensation of Gentile grace; what's yet to come is its resumption and fulfillment.

The Prophetic Message vs. the Mystery Message

The right division of God's Word is acknowledging God's two programs — his program with the nation Israel and his program with the new creation, the church, the Body of Christ: the prophetic message and the mystery message. One message has been spoken about since the world began; the other God kept secret since the world began and said nothing about until he first revealed it to the Apostle Paul — and the two can't be the same thing.

Paul's Apostleship vs. the Twelve

Paul is the apostle of the Gentiles, a very distinct and special office; he is not a replacement for Judas and not aligned with the twelve — a brand new and different apostle. Matthias properly replaced Judas, and Judas' replacement is a prophesied apostle, prophesied in Psalm 109; Paul is not a prophesied apostle and never could have met the Lord's qualifications.

The Gospel of the Kingdom vs. the Gospel Given to Paul

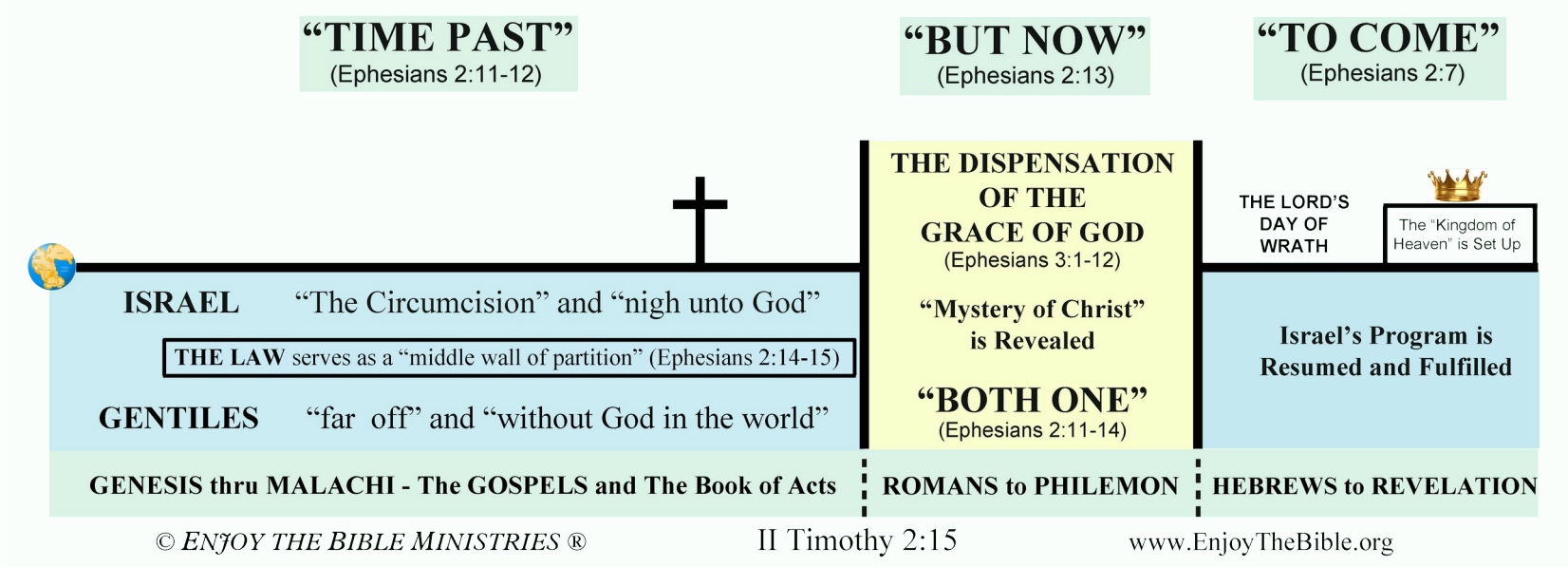
The gospel of the kingdom — the gospel of the circumcision, as Paul describes it in Galatians 2 — was the good news that the time for the kingdom to be established was at hand. The gospel God gave Paul for us to preach today is called the gospel of the grace of God and the preaching of the cross; on Galatians 2:7 Keith says, "Two separate distinct gospels. Not one gospel going to two different groups."

Scriptural vs. Dispensational

You can be 100% scriptural and be dead wrong in God's sight and dishonor the Lord; being scriptural isn't enough — to rightly divide is to be dispensational in your Bible study and Bible handling. Leviticus 11 refused some things and Paul, in I Timothy 4, says the Word of God sanctified them all; both are right, because there are two different programs.

Key Scripture References

Amos 8:11 ff.	A famine of the hearing of the word of God: the 400-year period between Malachi and John the Baptist when God said nothing to Israel — what the blank page in your Bible stands for
Matthew 10	The Lord commissions his twelve apostles (Paul not one of them); the ministry of the Lord himself, and that which he gave the twelve, excluded the Gentiles and even the Samaritans
Mark 16	The gospel of the kingdom to every creature; salvation based upon belief and water baptism — verse 16 says what it says; the signs in Mark 16 are Israel's signs, not yours
Acts 2:16	"This is that" which Joel spoke — so not the mystery of Christ, nor the birthday of the church, the body of Christ
Acts 5:31	"To give repentance to Israel" — in five words, a summary statement of everything going on in the opening chapter of the Book of Acts until Paul was raised up
Acts 9	The Lord Jesus Christ unexpectedly comes back from heaven and raises up Saul of Tarsus: the great dispensational change
Romans 9:4	"To whom *pertaineth*" — it doesn't say they did pertain, as if they don't any longer; things pertain to Israel that they aren't the full receivers of yet; God set their program aside temporarily and will resume it
Romans 11:25	Blindness in part — temporary — until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; then God resumes and fulfills his program with Israel
Romans 15:8	Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision when he was here; he isn't that right now
Romans 16:25	"My gospel": a special message committed to Paul with his distinctive apostleship; the mystery "kept secret since the world began" — the same terminology put in the negative
Galatians 2:7	The gospel of the uncircumcision and the gospel of the circumcision: two separate distinct gospels
Ephesians 2:11–13	How we Gentiles used to stand in God's sight before this dispensation of Gentile grace; "but now" describes the contrast between God's program in time past and his program right now
Ephesians 3:1–9	Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, raised up and sent out with a message for us Gentiles; the dispensation of Gentile grace given him for us God calls the mystery, and said nothing about it until he revealed it to Paul
I Timothy 4:1–5	The Holy Spirit speaking to the Body of Christ today; the Word of God sanctified what Leviticus 11 refused — two different programs
II Timothy 2:15	Rightly dividing the word of truth — the most critical issue in properly handling God's Word


"TIME PAST"
(Ephesians 2:11-12)
"BUT NOW"
(Ephesians 2:13)
"TO COME"
(Ephesians 2:7)
THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD
(Ephesians 3:1-12)
THE LORD'S DAY OF WRATH
The "Kingdom of Heaven" is Set Up
ISRAEL "The Circumcision" and "nigh unto God"
THE LAW serves as a "middle wall of partition" (Ephesians 2:14-15)
GENTILES "far off" and "without God in the world"
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"BOTH ONE"
(Ephesians 2:11-14)
Israel's Program is Resumed and Fulfilled
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