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
- The context shows improper Bible handling going on: Hymenaeus and Philetus weren't handling the Bible properly, and the things they were saying the Bible said were wrong
- To rightly divide is to make a division where a division belongs, and not take things from one part and apply them to another part
- 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

A Simple Illustration: Noah's Ark

- Genesis 6, 7 and 8 give the details of the flood, but God doesn't expect you or me to go out and build an ark — those aren't instructions to us today
- Building one would be disobeying God and grieving the Holy Spirit, yet no one could say you weren't scriptural; you could quote chapter and verse and still not be rightly dividing the word of truth

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)
- Paul is the one God expects you to listen to, because he's the one God sent out to you with the message God wants you to hear
- "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

What a Dispensation Is

- A dispensation is a program someone puts into effect to achieve an objective in view — as an economist would speak of an austerity dispensation, replaced by a prosperity dispensation if the economy turned around
- This is a grace program: God dispensed it by His grace, and grace is the key issue in all its operations

Time Past, But Now, and Things to Come

- The dispensation of Gentile grace had a beginning — when God raised up Paul, who isn't dealt with by God until Acts 9 — and has an end; before it God had an entirely different program, and He will return to it
- 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)
- Paul is describing how you stood as a Gentile, not before you were saved; Israel's status was "God *so* nigh unto them" (Deuteronomy 4:7) — a portion dealing with time past is not instructions to you today
- 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

But Now: Both Made One (Ephesians 2)

- In time past God gave Israel circumcision as a token of His covenant and set up a middle wall of partition in connection with the law contract; we Gentiles were without God in the world
- In the dispensation of grace Jew and Gentile stand at the exact same level before God; the purpose is to make one new man, a new creation to which the things of time past don't necessarily apply
- Paul's understanding — which ought to be ours too — is that God's word deals with things in time past, things right now, and things to come

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
- The adoption, the glory of the kingdom on this earth, the covenants, things in the law, and the special serving of God as a kingdom of priests pertain to Israel — but they don't have them yet
- It says "to whom *pertaineth*," not to whom they did pertain; God set their program aside temporarily and will pick it up again
- Christians thinking they are spiritual Israelites is one of the greatest mistakes of not rightly dividing — what men say when they mishandle God's word;

claiming Israel's things declares there is no integrity with God

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
- That resumption rests on two immutable things, the word of God and the covenants of God; Israel is still beloved for the fathers' sakes, because God's integrity is at stake

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
- God's purpose in making Abraham and his seed a great nation is the establishment of God's kingdom on this earth — Israel's job; it is never going to happen in this dispensation and isn't what the one new man is designed to do

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
- Paul had already explained rightly dividing to Timothy; if we know Romans 9, 10 and 11 and Ephesians 2 and 3, we know what it means — God's Word naturally divides itself into time past, but now, and to come

L3

God's Word Laid Out: Prophetic and Mystery Messages

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

Why Rightly Dividing Matters Most

- This dispensation is a new program and a mystery program, not anticipated or prophesied; most importantly, God is dealing with us in an entirely different manner than He dealt with Israel in time past, or will when He resumes His program
- Christians who claim promises the Lord gave to Peter, James, and John and the remnant of Israel do so in disobedience to God, and dishonor Him

Time Past, But Now, and To Come

- God hasn't put His Word together haphazardly; He superintended its construction, compilation and preservation, and put it together in a doctrinal manner, not in the order the books were written
- 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
- The men mishandling the word in Ephesus weren't recognizing a distinction between the mystery revelation for today and the prophecy program

Time Past: Genesis Through the Opening Chapters of Acts

- Genesis is the book of beginnings; from chapter 12 it sets out the beginning of the nation Israel, as God called Abraham out to make of him a great nation
- Genesis through Malachi is all time past ground; the dispensation of Gentile grace isn't in view there — God was still keeping it a secret
- 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)
- At Matthew 1:1 nothing brand new gets underway; the new covenant wasn't even preparatorily established for Israel until Christ died upon the cross
- 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
- The Bible doesn't end with Philemon because God's program with Israel isn't over; Hebrews through Revelation deals with the resumption of Israel's program and its fulfillment

Two Programs, Two Messages; a First Example

- The right division of God's word isn't Old Testament, New Testament; it is acknowledging God's two programs — with the nation Israel and with the new creation, the church, the Body of Christ
- 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
- To rightly divide is, said another way, to be dispensational in your Bible study and Bible handling; a Christian cannot do all the Bible says and take all the

Bible for themselves

Meats: Leviticus 11 and I Timothy 4

- Israelites who ate the forbidden meats became unclean and had to go outside the camp; in Paul's epistles the whole issue of dietary commands is thrown out the window, so to speak
- 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
- It's impossible for a Christian today to follow the dictates of Leviticus 11 and please God

Doctrines of Devils and Satan's Policy of Evil

- The "doctrines of devils" are going to be taken from the Bible; Satan wants members of the body of Christ to be Bible handlers, living as if they were in time past or in what's to come
- His ministers will be found where the Bible is — scriptural, but not dispensational; the Holy Spirit is warning about undispensational Bible handling and Bible teachers
- 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

- In John's gospel you're back in time past; circumcision, instituted in Abraham's day (Genesis 17) as the sign of the covenant, had profit under Israel's program, and the Lord Jesus Christ, made under the law, was circumcised on the eighth day
- 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

- Leviticus 23 sets Israel's calendar before them, and Israel couldn't properly worship the Lord without it; Paul calls all those things the rudiments of the world or the elements of the world
- The bewitched Galatians put themselves back under Israel's program; but under the law and the adoption of sons are two different positions, and it's impossible to do Leviticus 23 and Galatians 4 at the same time
- 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
- Teaching the law properly as part of Israel's program needs to be done; but telling a member of the body of Christ to please God by keeping the Ten Commandments is "vain jangling" — false doctrine

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
- If a blank page indicated the portion for today, it ought to come between Acts 28 and Romans 1, with another between Philemon and Hebrews 1
- 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
- With the mystery program in effect right now, Israel's program is suspended; even Genesis 1:1 indicates God has two spheres, and you must rightly divide to keep the two programs and the twofold purpose distinct

Rightly Dividing Reaches Your Daily Life

- Everything Paul talks about in his epistles deals with this dispensation of grace; the differences from God's program with Israel affect issues as personal as prayer
- Most Christians open up to the gospel accounts on pleasing the Lord in their daily walk; red letter editions damage a new believer's understanding — if there are to be red letters, they ought to be Romans through Philemon

Under the Law in the Lord's Earthly Ministry

- The Lord Jesus Christ was made of a woman, made under the law, lived under the law and taught the disciples they were under the law; the law and the old covenant are in effect in his earthly ministry
- The new covenant does not get underway in the Lord's earthly ministry; at the cross the provision for it is there, and it later becomes of force to Israel, as the book of Hebrews indicates
- At Matthew 1 you don't start off on New Testament ground, much less a new dispensation or new program of God

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 books of the Apocrypha were written during the time God said he was silent; they aren't the Word of God and don't belong in your Bible

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

- Three things show the gospel accounts and the opening chapter of the book of Acts are God's program with Israel: who Christ said he came to, what Keith calls the gospel of the gospels, and the sign ministry
- 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

- "The grace that is given to me of God" is Paul's expression for his unique apostleship with the mystery of Christ and the dispensation of grace committed to him
- 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
- The passage contrasts the Lord's two ministries — his earthly ministry and his ministry from heaven through Paul, contained in Romans through Philemon

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
- He was confirming the promises, not yet fulfilling them — confirming to Israel that the climactic stage in God's dealings with them had arrived
- The climactic stage has two parts: meek and lowly, when he confirms the promises; power and great glory, when he fulfills them; verses 8–12 are what was, verses 13 and following what is now

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
- Let the Bible tell you what is going on — not theologians, Bible teachers, or even Keith; God is the greatest hair splitter, and when the Lord said don't go to the Gentiles, he meant it

Children and Dogs

- Only twice in his earthly ministry did the Lord deal with a Gentile — a woman and a man — and only because they blessed Israel and came through his people's mediation
- He was sent "unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; in his mind the children are Israel and the dogs are Gentiles, and the woman of Canaan did not qualify

- Her “Truth, Lord” is her submission as a Gentile dog: she availed herself of the Mosaic law’s provision for a stranger who submits to Israel — and her dog status never changed
- “Let the children first be filled”: the children are first filled, then the dogs get dealt with

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
- The issue is not a brand-new creation, the Church, the Body of Christ, with Jew and Gentile on the same level, but the literal, physical reigning of God in a theocratic kingdom on this earth
- In Zacharias’ prophecy his people are the nation Israel, not the world and not Gentiles; “saved from our enemies” — and those enemies are Gentiles
- The satanic policy of evil against Israel in time past used the Gentiles against Israel; John’s ministry was to give Israel knowledge of that salvation, which is why he talks about the wrath to come

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
- As a Gentile your status was an enemy of God — one of the two deadnesses was simply being a Gentile, because God’s program was with Israel in time past
- Without the mystery of Christ, the message Gentiles would have heard after the Lord’s earthly ministry would have been “get your arms ready”

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 kingdom of heaven is not heaven itself nor a spiritual reigning in men’s hearts, but a literal reigning of God on this earth administered through the nation of Israel; kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are the exact same

thing

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

- The day of the Lord's wrath is coming, the last thing on the time schedule; "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" stresses the urgency for Israel to change their mind about themselves
- The day of Pentecost is a prophesied event, sitting in Isaiah 40; the chaff is the rebellious element in Israel, and the remnant of Israel is the little flock, the prophesied church of Israel
- 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
- Selling all they have is not something God is telling you to do today; the fire of his wrath was "already kindled," and peace comes only when the kingdom is established

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 Lord outlines Daniel 11 and 12, about the day of the Lord's wrath, the final stage in God's program with Israel; the elect there are Israel, not you as the elect in the dispensation of grace
- They anticipated only one coming — immediately after the tribulation; the only place in the Bible with anything about a rapture is the Pauline epistles, part of the revelation of the mystery

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
- The program did not change with the cross; the cross was a necessary thing for Israel to get the kingdom
- In the commissions of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20 and Acts 1 the message is still the gospel of the kingdom; the only difference is the whole package deal is now in view

Mark 16: Believe and Be Baptized

- The gospel "to every creature" in Mark 16:15 is the gospel of the kingdom, because Israel's program is to reach every creature through the kingdom; he did not change the gospel in the five days since Matthew 24

- Salvation in the gospel of the kingdom is based on belief and water baptism; you could not believe John's message and not be water 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 two hallmark signs: healing Israel's physical infirmities, which Isaiah 35 said would be going on in the days of the Messiah, and casting the unclean spirits out of the land (Zechariah 13)
- 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

Nothing About the Death, Burial and Resurrection

- The gospel of the kingdom made no reference to Christ's death, burial and resurrection; Luke 18:34 says three times the twelve did not know — they said nothing about it because they knew nothing about it
- When the Lord first said it, at about the two-and-a-half-year mark, Peter wanted to prevent the cross; he saw no value in it and did not understand it

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 opening chapters of Acts open up and commence Israel's last days; the dispensation of Gentile grace did not come in until God raised up the Apostle Paul as a brand-new and different apostle
- 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

- Matthias properly replaced Judas; one of the commandments the Lord gave the apostles was to replace Judas, so Peter was not running ahead of God but doing what God commanded him to do
- 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)

- The rock is not Peter himself but the revelation of verse 17; there was a prophesied church, sitting back in the 22nd Psalm, long before the dispensation of grace
- 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

Hebrews 2: the Confirming Ministry of the Twelve

- Hebrews focuses upon the resumption of God's program with Israel; in this dispensation of Gentile grace God is not speaking to his Hebrew people
- The great salvation first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to the Hebrew people by the twelve; the signs, wonders and diverse miracles validate the gospel of the kingdom

The Promise of the Father and Israel's Cleansing

- In the forty days the Lord did not change the program; he still spoke the same things about the kingdom of God, and their commission in his absence was Jerusalem first
- Israel's prescription for cleansing, outlined in Ezekiel 36, runs in order: John's water baptism, the benefit of Christ's redemptive work applied to the believing remnant, the day of Pentecost, then preservation into the kingdom
- John the Baptist outlines the rest of the program and mentions nothing about a dispensation of grace — still a mystery

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 times or seasons are those of an extension of mercy and forbearance by which God would lengthen Israel's last days before he began his day of wrath
- 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
- The calendar moves from Passover to Tabernacles with no dispensation of grace involved, and we in the dispensation of grace don't operate in Israel's calendar
- The event is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believing remnant; Peter is the one given the keys to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 16

"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
- Joel 2 outlines the intensified signs in Israel in the last days — the last seven years on Daniel’s time schedule, which the Lord told Peter, James and John he was extending with an extension of mercy and forbearance at its beginning

Save Yourselves from This Untoward Generation

- The remnant whom the Lord shall call in Joel 2:32 is the kingdom church of Matthew 16, the remnant of Israel the Lord began calling through Peter, James and John
- The salvation in view in Acts 2:40 is being saved from this untoward generation; God extends mercy and forbearance before he destroys it in the day of his wrath, and Peter exhorts them to avail themselves of Israel’s prescription for cleansing
- In the entire passage Peter never once told Israel to trust in Jesus Christ and his redemptive work on their behalf for their salvation

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

Stephen: the Third and Final Opportunity

- The Holy Spirit gives the rulers of Israel three manifest, honest opportunities to change their mind about Jesus of Nazareth; the last, with Stephen in Acts 7, brings the extension of mercy and forbearance to a close
- Acts 7 is a historical recap of the persistent and consistent negative response of Israel’s leaders, their rejection of the Messiah its capstone; they were not pricked in their hearts as on the day of Pentecost

Standing, Not Sitting — and Saul Raised Up

- On Pentecost Peter says Jesus sits at the Father’s right hand fulfilling Psalm 110:1; when Stephen sees him he is no longer sitting but standing — the time has come to make his enemy his footstool
- 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

- The prevailing viewpoint is that Peter and the other eleven made a mistake replacing Judas with Matthias, so the Lord had to raise up Paul in Acts 9; let the Bible and God tell you what is going on
- 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
- One apostle represents each tribe — twelve is not an arbitrary number; that complement of twelve had to be there for the promise of the Father to be upon the twelve
- 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

- The qualifications are the Lord Jesus Christ's, not Peter's own ideas, and Paul never could have met them; of the whole group of 120 men, only two did
- Peter says all this because of Matthew 19, Luke 22 and John 15: the twelve will have twelve thrones in the regeneration judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and only an apostle who fulfills that qualification can sit on one
- 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

- As God magnified Moses' office so Israel would stick with Moses, he magnified Paul's apostleship so members of the body of Christ will stick with Paul, because the program has come through him
- 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

Colossians 2: Paul's Conflict

- Paul has a battle because an adversary is battling against the full establishment and full acknowledgement — the satanic policy of evil against the message for today
- The concern is that you understand it, live in accordance with it, and remain unmovable and steadfast in it; if not, the adversary is having his way with you

Galatians 2: Two Separate Distinct Gospels

- God sent Paul to Jerusalem to explain the change of programs to the Jerusalem apostles and saints, whose program was now in abeyance; Paul added to them, since they had not been given the revelation of the mystery
- 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

- One reason to rightly divide the word of truth is that what Satan was doing in time past he is not necessarily doing today; you need right division to know what God is doing and what the adversary is doing
- 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
- God's plan from Genesis 3:15 has been the repossession of the earth; his prophesied plan said nothing about repossessing and reconciling the heavenly places — that is what the revelation of the mystery is about
- Satan is the prince of the power of the air; the rapture takes the church to meet the Lord in the air, that very realm, and our position and vocation in Christ are in the heavenly places

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
- Satan challenged God on the issue of wisdom; by keeping a secret God demonstrated that Satan's self-professed superior wisdom doesn't exist — he is really a fool — and crucifying the Lord of glory sealed the doom of his plan of evil

Spoiled, Open Show, Triumph (Colossians 2:15)

- Colossians 2:15 spells out three things: God spoiled them through what they thought was their victory, publicly exposed them as fools, and triumphed over them in the cross — so they hate the revelation of the mystery
- God wants the mystery made known and talked about by the members of the body of Christ, so that what echoes in their domain is the manifold wisdom of God; everything Satan does is to prevent that

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
- In Ephesians 4, verse 13 is God's objective with you — "a perfect man," the Greek term for a fully educated man — and verse 14 is Satan's objective: a child in understanding
- 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
- Follow the epistles in the order God gave them, from the milk of Romans to the full solid meat in Philemon; rightly dividing means no need to be ashamed, now or at the judgment seat of Christ

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. Everything from Genesis through Malachi is time past, and in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the opening chapters of the book of Acts you are still in that time past program; the dispensation of Gentile grace gets underway with God's raising up of Paul as a brand new apostle, and the great dispensational change takes place with the raising up of Paul in Acts 9. Hebrews through the book of the Revelation deal with the resumption of Israel's program and its fulfillment; the Bible doesn't end with Philemon because God's program with Israel isn't over. Right division isn't the issue of Old Testament, New Testament, nor putting the division between Malachi 4 and Matthew 1; if a blank page marked the portion for today, it ought to come between Acts 28 and Romans 1, with another between Philemon and Hebrews 1.

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 dispensation of grace started when the Lord Jesus Christ unexpectedly came back from heaven and raised up Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9; God will end it by what we call the rapture of the church. The dispensation of grace is God dealing with the Gentiles in spite of and without his program with the nation Israel; in Israel's program the Gentiles have to come through the nation of Israel, because that's who the program's with. Bringing God's kingdom to this earth is Israel's job; it is not what the one new man, the church, the body of Christ, is designed to do.

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. The mystery was not hid in the scriptures; it was hid in God, and God did not reveal it until the Lord came back from heaven in Acts 9, raised up Saul of Tarsus and revealed to him the mystery of Christ. "If it was spoken by any prophet before Paul came along, you know it's not the mystery of Christ." "Prophecy, mystery, prophecy. That's how you rightly divide the word of truth."

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. Paul is not a circumcision apostle — the gospel of the circumcision was not committed to him — and he was not sent to water baptize, another indication of the distinctiveness of his ministry and its difference from the twelve. As God made a big issue of Moses to Israel, he makes a big issue of Paul to you, because his word to you is vested in that apostle.

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. It made no reference to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; the testimony in Luke 18 is that those proclaiming it said nothing about it, because they knew nothing about it. The program did not change with the cross: in the commissions of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20 and Acts 1 the message proclaimed is still the gospel of the kingdom. 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." The message that the kingdom of heaven is at hand can't be preached today and tell the truth, because in the dispensation of Gentile grace God's program with Israel is set aside and the kingdom of heaven is not at hand today.

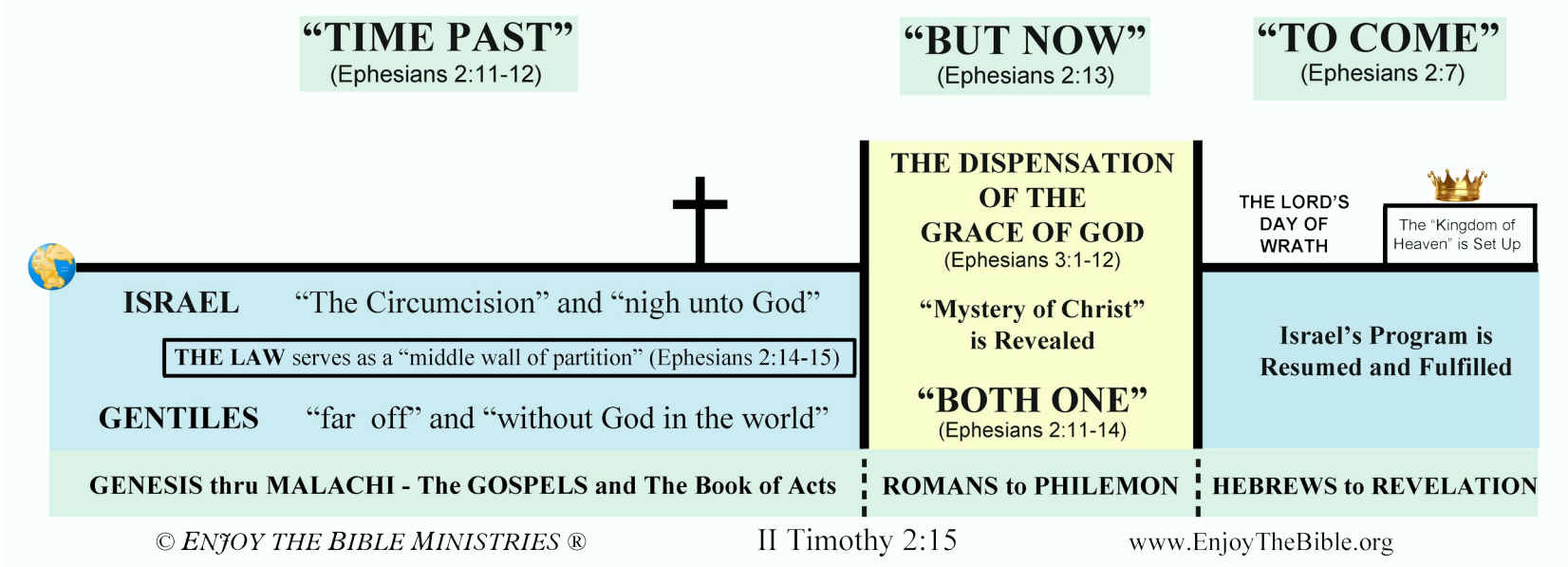
Scriptural vs. Dispensational

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. Satan's policy of evil is after getting Christians to be biblical, scriptural, but not dispensational; its phase one is to corrupt your understanding of what God is doing today.

Key Scripture References

Genesis 1:1	He created two realms, the heaven and the earth — an indication God has two spheres in which he operates
Leviticus 11	Dietary commands given to the children of Israel only; not an injunction to you
Deuteronomy 4:6–7	"God *so* nigh unto them" — Israel's status in time past; the nations were to see their alienation from God
Isaiah 40	Quoted in Matthew 3: John the Baptist a prophesied messenger with a prophesied message
Daniel 9	A time schedule determined against Israel and Jerusalem, comprising 490 years — not running in this dispensation of grace
Joel 2	The outline of the intensified signs in Israel in the last days; Peter quotes it on the day of Pentecost

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
Matthew 24	The apostles and remnant of Israel prepared to go through the day of the Lord's wrath; nothing to do with this dispensation of Gentile grace
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
Luke 1:32–33	The kingdom promised in the Davidic covenant, built upon the Abrahamic covenant — not a dispensation of Gentile grace
Luke 18:31–34	The twelve did not know or anticipate Christ's death, burial and resurrection
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
I Corinthians 2:7	The mystery is called the hidden wisdom of God; the main reason for keeping the mystery a mystery is to keep it a secret from Satan
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"
"Mystery of Christ" is Revealed
"BOTH ONE"
(Ephesians 2:11-14)
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