

Understanding the Bible

Respecting Distinctions

Tom Wilson

DRAFT

A Bible Study Guide

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The back cover caricature of the author was drawn by the well-known artist Jan van Haasteren as a favor to Els Rooswinkel, who maintained a web site dedicated to puzzles with artwork drawn by Jan. I originally created a version of this web site and handed it over to Els, who developed the site far beyond its initial content. In appreciation of my effort, Els asked Jan to draw me.

The latest edition of this e-book is available via <https://thechurchoforlando.org>.

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Table of Contents

Preface	v
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I Right Division Distinctions	1
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1 Prophecy vs. Mystery	2
1.1 What Is Prophecy?	2
1.2 What Is Mystery?	3
1.3 Rightly Dividing the Bible	4
1.4 Resolving Contradictions	5
1.5 Prophecy and Mystery on a Timeline	8
2 Dispensations	10
2.1 What Is a Dispensation?	10
2.2 A Traditional View of Dispensations	12
2.3 The Biblical Dispensations	13
3 The Many Gospels	23
3.1 What Does <i>Gospel</i> Mean in the Bible?	24
3.2 Is There More Than One Gospel?	24
3.3 The Gospel of God	25
3.4 The Gospel of the Kingdom	29
3.5 The Gospel of Christ	31
3.6 The Gospel of the Circumcision	34
3.7 The Gospel of the Uncircumcision	35
3.8 The Everlasting Gospel	36
4 Apostles	39
4.1 Jesus	40
4.2 The Twelve Apostles	40
4.3 The Seventy Apostles	42
4.4 Paul	43
4.5 Other Apostles	45
4.6 False Apostles	46
5 The Many Baptisms (planned)	48
6 The Churches (planned)	49

II Other Distinctions	50
7 In Christ (planned)	51
8 For Many or For All (planned)	52
9 Fulfilling the Law (planned)	53
10 Was God a Respector of Persons? (planned)	54
11 Covenants and Testaments (planned)	55
12 The Two Kingdoms (planned)	56
13 The Commission (planned)	57
III Appendices	58
A The Need for the Right Bible	59
A.1 The Prophets or Isaiah?	59
A.2 Dispensations	60
A.3 Studying Advanced Bible Topics	60
Reference Materials	62
Index of Bible Verses	63



List of Side Studies

1.1	History and Ages (Advanced Study)	8
2.1	Concordance Entry for <i>Dispensation</i> (Advanced Study)	11
2.2	What Can Man Eat?	11
2.3	Grace Witness vs. Manifested	14
2.4	The Transition into the Kingdom – Part 1	17
2.5	A Form of the Law During the Promise (Advanced Study)	18
2.6	The Transition into the Kingdom – Part 2	19
3.1	Concordance Entries for <i>Gospel</i> (Advanced Study)	23
3.2	What Followed the Gospel of God?	27
3.3	What Did Philip Preach? (Advanced Study)	28
3.4	What Did Peter Preach to Cornelius? (Advanced Study)	28
3.5	Whose Gospel Is It?	33
3.6	Fearing God	36
4.1	Concordance Entries for <i>Apostle</i> (Advanced Study)	39
4.2	Other Commission Details (Advanced Study)	41
4.3	Replacing Judas	42
4.4	Paul's Conversion	43
4.5	Why Paul Can't Replace Judas	44

Preface

Many independent video studies make up the contents of this study guide. One group of topics focused on rightly dividing the new testament. The remainder of the topics contained various topics that required noting distinctions to better understand them. The less mature believer doesn't understand the distinctions and thus are easily misled. The easiest example of bad teaching is that covenants and testaments are synonymous.

A Bible Study Guide

This book is referred to as "a bible study guide" since it is intended to make you study. Depending on the topic, a study guide may not have much discussion. This is typically true for more advance topics, where there may be many verses with little explanation. If you feel overwhelmed in this situation, you may be over your head. A guide is not meant to be a commentary on every given verse.

Typically, I have found most of the scriptures for you and organized them in a way that will help you draw the conclusion that God would have you draw. I don't have everything right, including my limited explanations. So, focus on the scriptures.

If you don't find yourself doing the following, you might not find the guide as useful as it meant to be:

- reading the larger context around the quoted verses,
- reading certain passages again and again,
- searching for words and phrases when you study, and
- looking at concordance information to learn more (if appropriate).

You are in charge of your maturing. Use the guide as you see fit.

A study guide may have side studies that address necessary background material. These side studies are blocked off from the main material so that they can be skipped or revisited. When a side study ends, it should help you return your focus to the interrupted topic.

A traffic light may appear in the margin. A **green** light indicates something positive worth noting. When applied to a verse or passage, it is an important scripture that is fundamental to the teaching. A **yellow** light is a warning that something may not be clear. It might highlight that I am giving my opinion, which could easily be wrong. A **red** light indicates something negative worth noting. It might accompany a quote from a corrupt bible or a tradition that is taught that isn't really the truth of the bible.

A "pointing finger" simply indicates something worth reading in order to help you find important information when skimming pages. A "thumbs up" indicates a positive message. A "thumbs down" indicates a negative one. These are very similar to the yellow, green, and red lights.

The main chapters and appendices have a whirlwind¹ symbol (🌀) in the bottom right corner of each page. This is a hyperlink that takes you to the index of verses. This is an easy way to go that index and look at verses that are elsewhere in the study guide. Hopefully, your PDF viewer has a way to come back to where you jumped from, eventually taking you back to the page where you clicked on the whirlwind.

¹The bible describes the Spirit as a whirlwind that could carry a prophet to another place.

How to Get the Most out of This Book

You can certainly print this book if you would like, but you will get the most out of it by using a good PDF reader and learning how to use it. The book contains many hyperlinks to navigate it. Examples are the table of contents and list of figures, chapter and figure references, and the page references in the bible verse index.

A good reader will allow you to navigate the table of contents as a sidebar. You can also create bookmarks and display those bookmarks in the sidebar. You can also highlight text and insert comments. These too can be displayed in the sidebar. Maybe your reader will have more facilities.

Having a good on-line bible will also aid you when you study using this book. That should have a concordance and you should go to the trouble to learn how to use it. Beware of commentaries! It is unlikely that anyone is teaching what you are reading here. You get to decide what you believe—whether it is right or wrong.

How to Improve This Book

You should have gotten this book for free with no expectation of giving anything in return. But you can give back to it by suggesting improvements, which might consist of the correction of simple typographical or spelling errors, or better explanations of verses.

You can submit feedback by first contacting me through the “Contact” link at <https://thechurchoforlando.org>. A reply will then ask you for your comments. Similarly, if you have clarifying questions, I might end up supplementing the book as a result.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone that has contributed to something open source or otherwise free. It has been a further motivation for me to make this book freely available. More specifically, I would like to thank everyone involved with

1. Linux, in general,
2. $\text{\LaTeX}$ and its numerous packages, Macintosh ports/tools (MacTex, TeXShop, TeXLive), and the $\text{\TeX}$ Users Group,
3. $\text{\LaTeX}$ Beamer in particular, and
4. the $\text{\LaTeX}$ discussion forums, where many of my problems were already solved.

There is no way to list all of the contributors.

We all benefit from a more robust version of this book.

Part I

Right Division Distinctions

1 Prophecy vs. Mystery	2
2 Dispensations	10
3 The Many Gospels	23
4 Apostles	39
5 The Many Baptisms (planned)	48
6 The Churches (planned)	49

Prophecy vs. Mystery

There are numerous distinctions in the bible, but most of them that we will focus on in this book concern distinguishing between prophecy and mystery. When I say *prophecy*, I don't mean a specific prophecy, but prophecy in general. Also, when I say *mystery*, I don't mean every mystery in the bible, but a specific kind of mystery. If this seems confusing, then you really need to read this chapter.

So, why must we distinguish between these two things. Well, this verse tells us to:¹

2 Timothy 2:15

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

Rightly dividing *the word of truth* means dividing *truth from truth* and not *truth from error*. The true bible, the *King James Bible*, does not contain any errors. The proper definition tells us that we must divide some parts of the bible from other parts of the bible. Some will say that we must divide the *old testament* from the *new testament*. Well, that can be done, but that is *wrongly dividing* because the new testament is not a cohesive set of scriptures with respect to doctrine. Understanding the testaments later in this book will help make that clear (see Chapter 11).

The main focus of 2 Timothy 2:15 is dividing *prophecy* from *mystery*, although lesser things can require division as well. Unfortunately, the majority of Christianity cannot see this need to divide the bible this way. The inability to see this is a result of believing the traditions of men.

1.1 What Is Prophecy?

Prophecy is a foretelling, a prediction, or a declaration of something to come. It is God's means to demonstrate an aspect of who he is. Only God can reveal what is to come.

2 Peter 1:21

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost.

Through prophecy, God has revealed much of his plans. As he has battled fallen angels and sinful men, he has foretold much of what he was going to do. Let's see a couple of verses that talk about prophecy's place in history:

Luke 1:70

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

Acts 3:20-21

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

¹It is really necessary to have the right bible for this verse: the *King James Bible*. See the study *The English Bible* study guide [7] to understand this fully.



- 21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Prophecy has been around since the world began (or, since the beginning of the creation). The verse in Acts takes place after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, so prophecy continued after the resurrection. Of course, we would expect prophecy to continue until all prophecies are fulfilled.

1.2 What Is Mystery?

A *mystery* can be a secret, something concealed, or something not understood until explained. There are a number of mysteries in the bible. God gives us mysteries to challenge us to study:

Proverbs 25:2

- 2 [It is] the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings [is] to search out a matter.

But, as I said before, we will focus on some specific mysteries.

Romans 16:25-26

- 25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,
26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

The passage above talks about a mystery that was kept secret since the world began. It is obviously revealed to us now. But until it was revealed, it was not known. Prophecy and mystery were in direct opposition: Something foretold (prophecy) could not be withheld (mystery).

Prophecy has come through many prophets. However, several mysteries were revealed to only one person, Paul. These few mysteries are collectively referred to as *mystery*, just as there are many prophecies in *prophecy*. Let's see more about the mystery:

Ephesians 3:2-7

- 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:
3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:
7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Paul says that what was revealed to him was not made known to other men. This particular mystery concerned Gentiles being fellowheirs with Israel. This was not true during prophecy.

First, let's see some more verses about the mystery. This one says that God hid some things from the princes of this world, which would include the fallen angels:

1 Corinthians 2:7-8

- 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, [even] the hidden [wisdom], which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known [it], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Colossians 1:25-27

- 25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;
26 [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

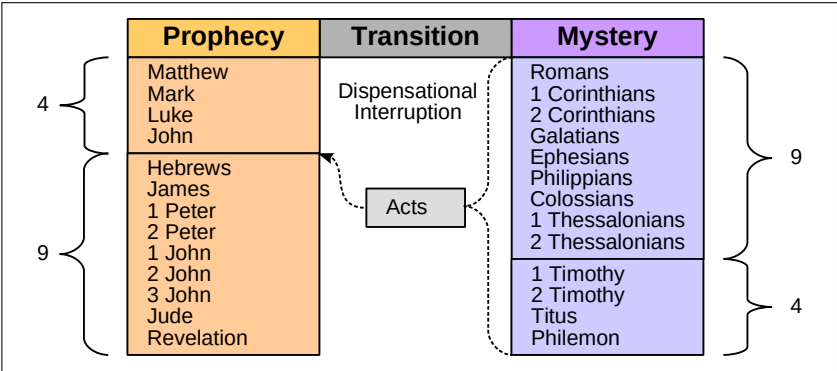
27 To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

Again, the mystery was hidden “from ages and from generations” until it was finally revealed.

1.3 Rightly Dividing the Bible

God made the division of prophecy and mystery very simple. Paul was the one who received all of the revelation of the mystery, and it is Paul who writes all of the books about it. You will find Paul's name as the first word of each of the books *Romans* through *Philemon*. The *prophecy* part of the bible is everything else. Most Christians have never heard of such a thing and will refuse to hear it!

Figure 1.1 demonstrates right division and additional aspects for the maturing of believers. The new testament is divided into two groups in Figure 1.1(a). The book of *Acts* provides a transition from prophecy to mystery.²



(a) The Structure of the New Testament

	Doctrine	Reproof	Correction	
His Coming	1 & 2 Thessalonians			
The Church	Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians	Meat for Adults
The Cross	Romans	1 & 2 Corinthians	Galatians	Milk for Babes

(b) The Structure of Paul's Church Epistles

	Doctrine	Reproof	Correction	
His Coming	Revelation			
The Church	2 Peter	1, 2, & 3 John	Jude	Meat for Adults
The Cross	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	Milk for Babes

(c) The Structure of the Hebrew Church Epistles

Figure 1.1: (a) This diagram shows how the new testament books are to be rightly divided. The book of *Acts* explains what happened to Israel during the transition to the dispensation of grace. Paul's (mystery) books are divided into 9 church epistles and 4 pastoral epistles. The prophecy books are divided into 4 gospel accounts and 9 church epistles. (b) This diagram shows how Paul's church epistles are organized according to 2 Timothy 3:16. (c) This diagram shows how the Hebrew epistles are similarly organized.

Another important verse allows us to see some structure in each group:

²Chapter 2 discusses dispensations.

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Figure 1.1(b) shows a structure in Paul's church letters. Figure 1.1(c) shows the same structure in the Hebrew, or Jewish, church letters. This structure only makes sense with right division. There would be no good reason to have two similarly structured sets of instructions if they are to all believers.

Paul's church letters provide *doctrine*, *reproof*, and *correction* for us today; the rest of the Bible is for instruction in righteousness. Here are what those terms mean:

- Doctrine: Instructs believers about what to believe and how to live
- Reproof: Points out where behavior does not align with belief
- Correction: Points out where belief does not align with doctrine

The foundation of Paul's teachings is the cross: *Romans* provides the doctrine, *1 & 2 Corinthians* provide the reproof, and *Galatians* provides the correction. This foundation is *milk for babes*:

1 Corinthians 3:2

2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able.

Most churches err in what the cross means. This mainly occurs by mixing Jesus' teachings with Paul's (note that Paul got his instructions from Jesus by revelation and not from his earthly ministry). Jesus didn't teach that his death, burial, and resurrection would bring forgiveness of sin to all; that information comes through Paul only.

Built upon the foundation is our church, called the *body of Christ*. *Ephesians* provides the doctrine, *Philippians* provides the reproof, and *Colossians* provides the correction. Those who don't properly understand the cross also do not understand our church. The Christian church is separate from Israel's church (which appears in the gospel accounts and *Acts* 1-7). These churches will be investigated in Chapter 6.

Finally, the final church epistles deal with Jesus' coming. *1 & 2 Thessalonians* provide the doctrine. There is no reproof or correction because we are transformed at his coming. You could also say that the doctrine, reproof, and correction are present in all of the letters.

The Hebrew epistles, which are written to Israel's church, have similar structure. Notice the reference to *milk for babes* in one of those letters:

Hebrews 5:12-14

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which [be] the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
 13 For every one that useth milk [is] unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.
 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Notice that those who use milk are unskillful in the word of righteousness! *Hebrews* teaches what the cross means to the Hebrew church (of the past and of the future). The cross has a different meaning to them compared to us today.

Each of the two churches has a coming of Jesus. Jesus' coming for us is *in the air* because we are a heavenly church while his coming for Israel is *to the earth* because they are an earthly church/nation.

God has organized the books of the new testament for us with structure in mind. While there was a transition from prophecy to mystery, there is no need for a transition back. When the mystery period ends, prophecy will continue as before. Of course, the bible will still be around and those following prophecy will still have to rightly divide. Paul's mystery letters will still be useful, but will not contain primary doctrine for believers at that time.

There is also structure in the gospel accounts, Paul's pastoral epistles, and the old testament. See *The English Bible* study guide [7] for more information concerning structure in the bible.

1.4 Resolving Contradictions

Have you ever thought that there would be contradictions in the bible? Contradictions aren't errors: the *King James Bible* has no errors.³ But, you know there are some contradictions: Adam couldn't eat meat, but Noah

³Unfortunately, other bibles have errors. See *The English Bible* study guide [7].

could. There were certain meats that Jews couldn't eat. How do you know what applies to you?⁴ Contradictions are resolved by knowing what is written to you and what is not. They also arise in the new testament. We will consider the contradictions between prophecy and mystery.

1.4.1 Baptize or Don't Baptize

Before Jesus began his ministry, this is said about John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:1-6

- 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
- 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
- 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
- 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
- 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

He was called *the Baptist* for a reason: baptism was a key part of his message. Jesus' disciples did the same:

John 4:1-2

- 1 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,
- 2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

Jesus told his apostles to continue this after his ascension to heaven:

Matthew 28:19

- 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Peter followed those instructions:⁵

Acts 2:38

- 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

As part of the mystery, Paul, who also was an apostle, was not supposed to baptize:

1 Corinthians 1:17

- 17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

In Chapter 4, we will see that Paul was an apostle sent by Jesus, but with different instructions. Paul acknowledged that baptism was part of the prophecy program:

Acts 19:4

- 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

People find ways to overlook that Paul wasn't to baptize because they will cite that Paul baptized a few:

1 Corinthians 1:14-15

- 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;
- 15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

We will investigate baptism more fully in Chapter 5.

⁴The discussion of what can be eaten occurs in Side Study 2.2.

⁵If you study, you will learn that no one ever baptized according to Matthew 28:19. Everyone baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Refer to *The Revelation of God* study guide [8] for more information.



1.4.2 Justification: With or Without Works

Here is an example of the confusion that results when you don't rightly divide the bible. The first passage is part of prophecy:

James 2:21-24

- 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.
 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

The next passage is part of the mystery:

Romans 4:2-3

- 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath [whereof] to glory; but not before God.
 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Both Romans 4:3 and James 2:23 quote this verse:

Genesis 15:6

- 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans says that Abraham was justified without works; *James* says that he was justified by works. How can both be true? They are both true, but not at the same time in history. Abraham was justified by faith in Genesis 15. He demonstrated his faith by works in Genesis 22. We don't demonstrate our faith by works today.

1.4.3 Forgiveness: Later or Now

In prophecy, Israel's national forgiveness comes when Jesus returns (i.e., the 2nd coming):

Acts 3:19

- 19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

In the mystery, forgiveness comes at the point of believing:

Colossians 2:13

- 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

These are very different.

1.4.4 Forgive to be Forgiven or Already Forgiven

In prophecy, forgiveness is dependent on a believer forgiving his brothers:

Matthew 6:14-15

- 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In the mystery, forgiveness has already been freely given.

Ephesians 4:32

- 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

As a result, we are to forgive others. Again, these are very different.

1.4.5 Old Law Covenant: Vanishing or Abolished

In prophecy, the old covenant, also called *the law*, is waiting for the new covenant to come:

Hebrews 8:13
13 In that he saith, A new [covenant], he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old [is] ready to vanish away.

The old covenant is “ready to vanish away” (and the new covenant has not yet come—see Chapter 11). In the mystery, the law has been abolished:

2 Corinthians 3:13
13 And not as Moses, [which] put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

We are not under any covenants during the mystery. Obviously, these are very different too.

1.5 Prophecy and Mystery on a Timeline

Before we draw prophecy and mystery on a timeline, we need a timeline as a reference.

Side Study 1.1: History and Ages (Advanced Study)

The *Biblical Time* study guide [2] presents a timeline of history that covers approximately 7000 years. Almost 6000 years have already occurred and at least 1000 years are still to come. There have been approximately 2000 years from Adam until the call of Abraham, another 1000 years from Abraham until David’s reign, and another 1000 years from David until Christ. It has been almost 2000 years since Christ died.

With very rigorous study, it is possible to identify when certain events occurred in the past. Many judgments can be assigned to a date on the timeline. Examples are the fall of man, the flood, the confusing of languages at Babel, the plagues of Egypt, and the exile of Israel. Other events include the crucifixion of Christ and the fall of Israel.

In his letters, Paul tells us about time in the past, the present, and the future: These can be viewed as ages.

Ephesians 2:11-13
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;
12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

In the above passage, Paul references *time past* in verse 11 and *but now* in verse 13. The latter would be viewed as *the present*.

Paul also references the future:

Ephesians 2:7
7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Ages to come refers to multiple ages in the future. It doesn’t tell us what those ages are.

The reference to *time past* in Ephesians 2:11 specifically mentions that Gentiles were called “uncircumcision” by the “circumcision”. This would only be a time period that covers when the law was given. What about time before that? This verse is helpful:

Romans 5:14
14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Figure 1.2 shows our reference timeline with time shown in 1000-year increments. Below it are several reference judgment events. Four ages are shown. The *World to Come* is part of the *Ages to Come* (not shown). The *Ages*



to Come would really extend to the right beyond the 7000-year mark. As mentioned in Side Study 1.1, all of this information is detailed in the *Biblical Time* study guide [2].

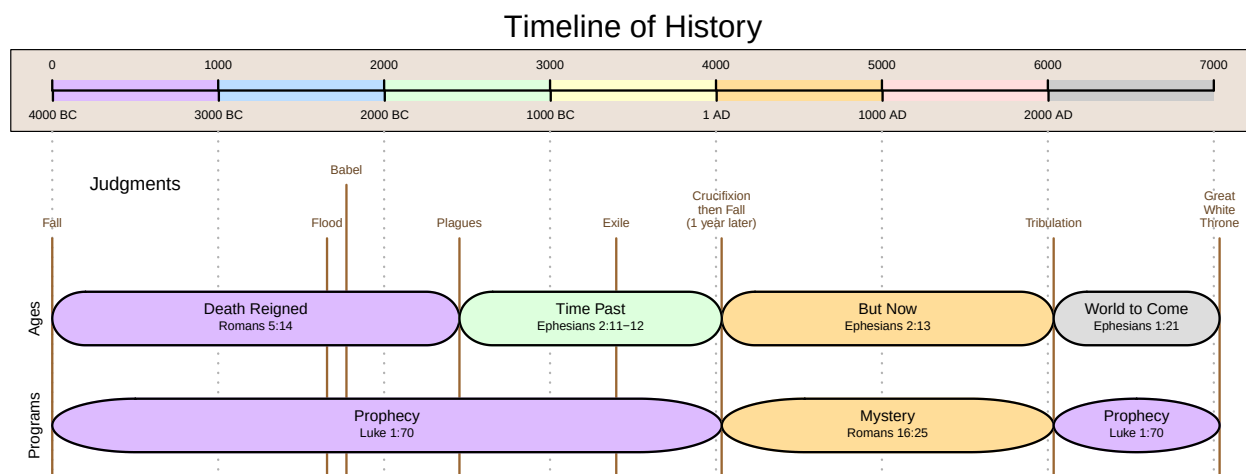


Figure 1.2: This timeline shows the past, present (called *But Now*), and future over a time period of 7000 years. The bible defines 4 ages that cover this time interval. Prophecy and mystery are shown in another category called *Programs*. Prophecy is everything other than *But Now*.

Adding prophecy and mystery to the timeline is very easy. It is Paul who tells us about the mystery revealed to him. He discusses it as occurring in the *but now* part of the timeline. Because the mystery interrupts prophecy, prophecy will continue when the mystery ends.

Conclusion

Prophecy and mystery are in direct opposition. Something foretold (prophecy) could not be withheld (mystery). Several mysteries were first revealed to Paul. God has structured his word so that dividing prophecy and mystery are very easy. Most Christians have never heard of these truths even though they are present in the bible. You must keep pondering this until it becomes clear to you.

Dispensations

Some distinctions in the bible arise due to different instructions in different dispensations. Unfortunately, many believers are not taught that there are dispensations, and so this results in disrespecting these many distinctions. Also, those that believe in dispensations often believe in too many of them.¹

Does the bible teach that there are dispensations? While the it doesn't focus on them, they are clearly taught. The word *dispensation* occurs 4 times.² Let's see those verses:

1 Corinthians 9:17

17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation [of the gospel] is committed unto me.

Ephesians 1:10

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; [even] in him:

Ephesians 3:2

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:

Colossians 1:25

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

To deny dispensations is a heresy, or at least evidence of spiritual immaturity. Corrupt bibles often do not use the word *dispensation*. Refer to Section A.2 for some examples.

2.1 What Is a Dispensation?

Let's consider the definition for *dispensation* in the 1828 Webster's Dictionary [1]:

1. *Distribution; the act of dealing out to different persons or places; as the dispensation of water indifferently to all parts of the earth.*
2. *The dealing of God to his creatures; the distribution of good and evil, natural or moral, in the divine government.*
3. *The granting of a license, or the license itself, to do what is forbidden by laws or canons, or to omit something which is commanded; that is, the dispensing with a law or canon, or the exemption of a particular person from the obligation to comply with its injunctions. The pope has power to dispense with the canons of the church, but has no right to grant dispensations to the injury of a third person.*

¹Ironically, someone that rightly divides is called a *hyperdispensationalist* regardless of how many dispensations he believes that there are. It is really his belief in the dispensation of grace that invites the slander. Those in error often have names for those that aren't.

²The number 4 symbolizes governance over the earth. How appropriate!



4. *That which is dispensed or bestowed; a system of principles and rites enjoined; as the Mosaic dispensation; the gospel dispensation; including, the former the Levitical law and rites; the latter the scheme of redemption by Christ.*

Definition #4 is close to the bible's usage, although it is clumsy. Definition #2 is applicable too, but is too generic. As is often the case, the dictionary can give you some insight, but it isn't always helpful.

Side Study 2.1: Concordance Entry for *Dispensation* (Advanced Study)

Another way to understand what a word means is to look at a concordance. A concordance often shows how a word is translated. That can give insight to its meaning. However, we shouldn't view all of the translated words as synonyms.

The word *dispensation* only occurs in the new testament, so let's look at the Greek word that it comes from:

***oikonomía* (G3622)**

From G3623; administration (of a household or estate); specially, a (religious) "economy":—dispensation, stewardship.

This word is translated as *dispensation*, *steward*, and *stewardship*. So, *stewardship* is a good meaning for the word, and likewise *administration* is an acceptable synonym. Isn't it strange that the dictionary doesn't use these words in any definition.

Since the word is also translated *stewardship*, this can also be investigated. The only instances come from G3622, and they are all in this passage:

Luke 16:2-4

- 2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.
- 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.
- 4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

However, further inquiry can be made into the word *steward*. Not only are there other Greek words, but there are also Hebrew words to look into. The point is to get a better understanding of what *dispensation* might mean.

A very important aspect to a dispensation is the administration, or agency, involved. This should be a key to our identification of different dispensations: Who is God's agency in each one?

When we consider that an administration has an administrator, we probably should not create a new administration (or dispensation) every time a new instruction is given to the administrator. The bible has new instructions given to man throughout it, but that shouldn't mean a new dispensation begins each time. So, the better question is: When does the administration (or, the administrator) change?

Side Study 2.2: What Can Man Eat?

Right division of the word of truth is more than just dividing prophecy and mystery. Other divisions are necessary since God has progressively revealed instruction. Consider what someone could eat during the time of prophecy. Let's start with the instructions that were given to Adam:

Genesis 2:16-17

- 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
- 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam only ate fruits and plants. After the flood, different instructions were given to Noah:

Genesis 9:3-4

- 3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
- 4 But flesh with the life thereof, [which is] the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

Noah could eat any meat. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he gave them the law covenant

which included these instructions:

Leviticus 11:2-3
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These [are] the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that [are] on the earth.
3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, [and] cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.

The passage goes on to list many things that Moses and the Israelites could not eat. After the mystery was revealed to Paul, God gave some different instructions to Peter, who was still following the law covenant:

Acts 10:11-15
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:
12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.
14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.
15 And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common.

Now Israelites could eat all things like Noah could. Of course, Paul tells us this:

1 Corinthians 10:27-29
27 If any of them that believe not bid you [to a feast], and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.
28 But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth [is] the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:
29 Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another [man's] conscience?

Not only can we eat all things, we aren't to worry about things sacrificed to idols. So, if all verses in the bible are equally important, which instructions do you follow? Some believers can grasp this example, but cannot continue to apply it to other concepts of the bible.

Finally, do we need a different dispensation because the instructions changed? If that were the case, there might be dozens, or even hundreds, of dispensations!

When we consider what Adam was told and what Noah was told, should we expect a new dispensation to begin with Noah? If that is the case, we might expect to see numerous dispensations throughout the bible. The key to understanding dispensations is to understand the agency that God is using to communicate with man.

It is important to note that a dispensation isn't a period of time (i.e., an age). Yet, a dispensation does occur during a period of time. We will observe that the dispensations do align with ages. So, they appear to be intertwined.

2.2 A Traditional View of Dispensations

Many people define 7 dispensations while others define as many as 12. The desire is to start a new dispensation after every "major" judgment. The problem with that is that there are numerous judgments in the bible.

Figure 2.1 shows a traditional view of dispensations. This view suggests that God uses a trial-and-error approach to his dealings with man. This is demonstrated by the "Man's Failure" row near the bottom of the diagram. They are also demonstrated to be tied to judgments as seen in the "God's Judgment" row. One of the most severe judgments by God was the carrying off of Israel into exile. Yet a new dispensation does not start afterward.

This is a view that does not respect distinctions in the bible. This is clearly seen with the dispensation of *Grace* ending with the tribulation. The dispensation of grace must end before the tribulation can come. Such a view ignores the active conflict by Satan against God and places all of the burden on man's failure. If you consider the first three dispensations, they simply come from man's reasoning. There is no scripture for it!

Free Will is often called *Innocence*, where man has the ability to choose. After the fall, man still has the ability to choose. Thus, *Innocence* seems to be a better name. Man doesn't fall on his own, it takes intervention by the devil.



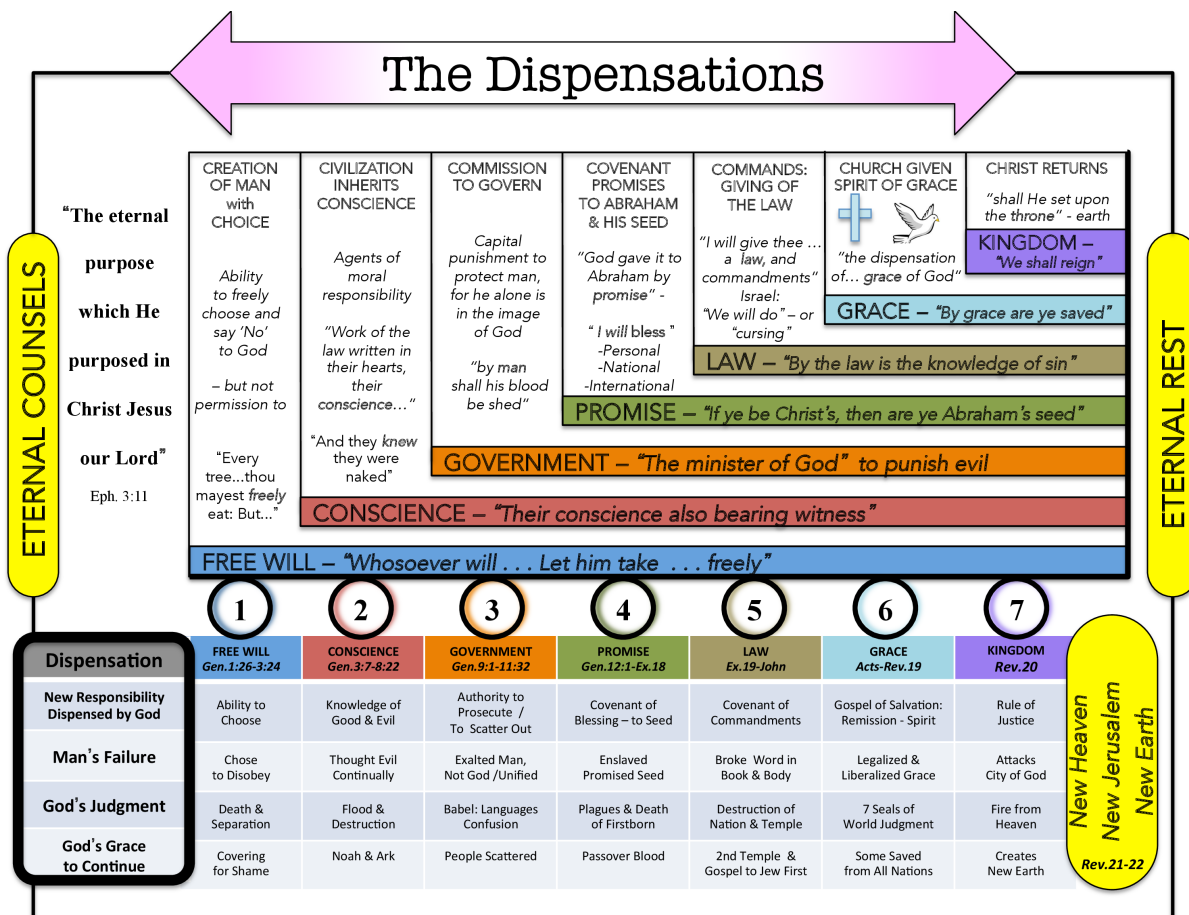


Figure 2.1: This diagram shows a view of dispensations that is commonly taught. While the later dispensations are correct, the earlier ones are not supported by scriptures. Nonetheless, even the details of the correct dispensations are incorrect because right division is not being applied.

Conscience is the next dispensation, but nowhere does God leave man to operate based upon his conscience. The word *conscience* doesn't even appear in the old testament. Nowhere does the new testament look back at this time period and describe it as a way of operating. Regardless, Adam (and man in general) is in charge before and after the fall. Man's general task is the same, but what he has to do is even harder.

Government is the next dispensation, and this too does not make sense. Adam was told to subdue the earth, which made man the governor of it. Noah was essentially told the same things as Adam, and so what has really changed? The main change is that government now has the responsibility to execute capital punishment. Such an idea may have occurred before the flood as witness by Cain's and Lamech's fears of being avenged for killing someone. But such punishment was required after the flood. The flood judgment isn't solely because of man's failure. It is the intervention by angels that had driven man to the extreme point of violence. Man is in charge before the flood and also after the flood.

Promise occurs next, but not because of the judgment at Babel. While nationalism is introduced, no specific nation is God's agent. In just 12 chapters of *Genesis*, four dispensations are defined. It is unfortunate and absurd. But, that is tradition for you. You can cling to it if you would like, or you can mature beyond it.

2.3 The Biblical Dispensations

We will define the dispensations using the scriptures. We will start with the current dispensation since it is the one that is the most clearly defined. Then we will define the others relative to the current one. So, the dispensations will not be given in a chronological order.

The other key aspect of this analysis will be that there are transitions between dispensations. This is usually ignored when a sloppy set of dispensations is constructed. God gives progressive revelation and usually has transitions into dispensational changes.

2.3.1 The Current Dispensation: Grace

All four verses using the word *dispensation* were written by Paul. Three of those four verses refer to the current dispensation. They are repeated here for you:

1 Corinthians 9:17
17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation [of the gospel] is committed unto me.
Ephesians 3:2
2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:
Colossians 1:25
25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

Paul said that he had a dispensation given to him for us. What is being dispensed is grace.

Side Study 2.3: Grace Witness vs. Manifested

Isn't grace in every dispensation? Some will object to a dispensation of grace since grace appears elsewhere in the bible. The problem with that perspective is that it does not respect the distinctions in the bible. There is a difference between grace now and grace elsewhere in the bible.

Let's see mention of grace in the old testament:

Genesis 6:8
8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.
Exodus 34:6
6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,
Jonah 4:2
2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, [was] not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou [art] a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Now, let's see the distinction that Paul gives us concerning grace today:

Romans 3:21-22
21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
22 Even the righteousness of God [which is] by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

The law and the prophets witnessed to grace, but grace is fully manifest now.

Let's see how Abraham experienced grace:

Genesis 15:6
6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
Romans 4:3
3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

By grace, Abraham was justified by believing what God said (i.e., by faith).

David should have died according to the law, but was forgiven by grace:

Romans 4:6

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

While the old testament saints witnessed grace, the law was not done away with like it is today:

Romans 6:14

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Law and grace are opposites.

Romans 11:6

6 And if by grace, then [is it] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if [it be] of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

So how could grace exist during the law? The law and its works obscured grace. Grace could break forth to be witnessed, but then the law would obscure it again. Grace today is like the sun shining on a cloudless day. Grace under the law was like rays of sunshine occasionally breaking through the dense clouds on a completely overcast day.

Galatians 3:12

12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Likewise, a Christian can hinder grace by trying to follow the law today:

Galatians 5:4

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Under the law (and even before it), righteousness still came by faith, but was manifested by works that demonstrated it because the works obscured grace:

Hebrews 11:4

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Hebrews 11:7

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Even when Jesus came, the law was still in effect. Someone could be justified by faith, but still manifested his faith through works, such as baptism.

James 2:22

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

In the dispensation of grace, we do nothing to demonstrate our righteousness. We have it by faith:

Romans 3:28

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

The body of Christ (often called *the church*) is God's agency during this time period. The church operates according to Paul's letters: *Romans* through *Philemon*. The book of *Acts* gives us history as to how the mystery interrupted prophecy, yet it is not a book of doctrine for us.

Paul tells us that this dispensation will end with the resurrection and rapture of the church, but does not tell us

when it will come (see the *Resurrection* study guide [4]). It should not involve a judgment since God is at peace with the world at this time.

There are two clear people groups during the dispensation of grace: the body of Christ and the heathen. God is working through his church, the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:27

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Ephesians 1:22-23

22 And hath put all [things] under his feet, and gave him [to be] the head over all [things] to the church,
23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Colossians 3:11

11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all.

There are no distinctions for those that are saved.

The heathen, which includes lost Jews, are identified in the scripture:

Galatians 1:16

16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Galatians 2:9

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

There are nations during this time, but none are recognized or in charge. The body of Christ does not reign, but speaks for God through his written word rightly divided.

There is no law in the form of a covenant for the church today. We still have commands that we are to obey, but there are no defined rituals or worship system. There is nothing that you can do to “fix” whatever you have done incorrectly. Those that attempt to follow the law are simply immature (i.e., Galatians 5:4). Falling from grace isn’t losing ones salvation. It is simply trying to works to please God when it is impossible to do so.

Dispensation Quick Facts: Grace

Began: When Paul was saved in Acts 9

Ends: When the body of Christ is resurrected and raptured (not the tribulation)

Law & Priesthood: None

Agency: Body of Christ

Transition: None

Books: Romans to Philemon (and Acts 9-28 for history)

2.3.2 The Previous Dispensation: The Law and the Prophets

What was the dispensation before the dispensation of grace? It is commonly taught that the previous dispensation is called *the law*. But does the bible call it that? Luke, Paul’s companion in *Acts*, gives us something better:

Luke 16:16

16 The law and the prophets [were] until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

Paul uses the same phrase:

Romans 3:21

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Technically, the law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist. So what was going on from John the Baptist until Paul? It is a transition from the law and the prophets to the kingdom. But grace interrupted that transition. We will discuss what was supposed to follow the law and the prophets later because it didn't come. We will also discuss this transition fully at that time.

Side Study 2.4: The Transition into the Kingdom – Part 1

The transition into the kingdom began with John the Baptist. The time from then until the kingdom was expected to be about a generation (i.e., 40 years – see the *Biblical Time* study guide [2] for a discussion of this):

Matthew 24:34

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

During this transition, Jesus brought many new teachings. The law covenant will still be in place, but Jesus eventually cursed it when he cursed the fig tree in Matthew 21:18-21. This transition was to culminate in Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27), or the tribulation, followed by Christ's return. However, this transition was interrupted when Israel rejected the final offer of the kingdom in Acts 7.

The *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, *John* and Acts 1-8 cover this time period (*Matthew* may have been the only book completed by this time).

So, the law and the prophets preceded grace. We know the law began with Moses (John 7:19). The period of the law and prophets contains many judgments. For example, there are the 5 courses of chastisement prophesied in Leviticus 26 (refer to the *Ruth* study guide [5] appendix for a study of these chastisements). Yet none of these started a new dispensation. And God's agency was Israel throughout.

Salvation occurred through Israel's law covenant:

Ephesians 2:12

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

God made a new nation:

Acts 7:8

8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so [Abraham] begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac [begat] Jacob; and Jacob [begat] the twelve patriarchs.

Numbers 23:9-10

9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.
10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth [part] of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

There are other names used for these people groups:

Ephesians 2:11

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;

The nation of Israel was God's agency on the earth.

Romans 3:1-2

1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit [is there] of circumcision?
2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Dispensation Quick Facts: The Law and the Prophets

Began: When the old testament law was given to Israel in Exodus 19

Ended: When John the Baptist began his ministry

Law & Priesthood: Written old testament law and Levitical priesthood; chosen prophets from Israel

Agency: The nation of Israel



Transition: From the call of Abraham until Israel is freed from bondage in Egypt

Books: Exodus to Malachi; transition into: Genesis 12-50 and Job; transition out of: Matthew to John, Acts 1-8

2.3.3 The First Dispensation: Promise

Paul describes the dispensation that precedes the law:

Galatians 3:19

19 Wherefore then [serveth] the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; [and it was] ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Note that the *law* was **added** to the *promise*. But, the law didn't nullify the promise:

Galatians 3:21

21 [Is] the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

This dispensation begins with the promise of a seed:

Genesis 3:15

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The promise continued with Abraham:

Galatians 3:16

16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Job awaited the promise (i.e., his redeemer):

Job 19:25-27

25 For I know [that] my redeemer liveth, and [that] he shall stand at the latter [day] upon the earth:
26 And [though] after my skin [worms] destroy this [body], yet in my flesh shall I see God:
27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; [though] my reins be consumed within me.

After the law came, God refined the promise through David:

Romans 1:2-3

2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures),
3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

It might not be clear who is in charge (i.e., who is the steward) during this dispensation. We saw in Side Study 1.1 that death reigned during this time (refer to Figure 2.2). Nonetheless, man, in general, is God's steward. The dispensation begins with Adam (he represents all men). Noah is given similar instructions as Adam.

God is speaking to man through prophets or preachers (such as Enoch or Noah). There is oral communication, but nothing is written and retained.

Side Study 2.5: A Form of the Law During the Promise (Advanced Study)

As is the theme in this book, there are distinctions everywhere in the bible if you will look for them. The people before the law didn't operate in a vacuum where God had told man nothing. Paul tells us that Gentiles understand elements of the law:

Romans 2:14-15

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and [their] thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Verse 15 says that the Gentiles show the law written in their hearts. The people during the time of promise did sacrifices and offerings: Abel in Genesis 4:3-5 (and Hebrews 11:4), Noah in Genesis 8:20, Abraham in Genesis 22:2-8, and Jacob in Genesis 35:14. This can be furthered by looking for verses that reference an altar (e.g., Isaac in Genesis 26:25). Job did the duties of a priest for his family (Job 1:5) and prayed for his friends (Job 42:8).

Recall that Abraham met Melchizedek:

Genesis 14:18

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he [was] the priest of the most high God.

He was a priest before Aaron was made a priest under the law covenant.

Noah knew which animals were clean and unclean in Genesis 7:2; this showed up in the written law in Leviticus 11:2-24. There is reference to nakedness in Genesis 9:22; this showed up in the written law in Leviticus 18:6-8 and Leviticus 20:11. Noah cursed Canaan in Genesis 9:25; this showed up in the law in Deuteronomy 23:2 (refer to the *How to Study the Bible – Volume 2* study guide [3] to understand these events with Noah). Judah understood levirate marriage in Genesis 38:8-9; this showed up in the written law in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (refer to the *Ruth* study guide [5] for more information).

Before Babel, there was just “man” (or, “all men”). The judgment at Babel brought forth nations (or, Gentiles):

Genesis 11:9

9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis 10:5

5 By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

But God didn't deal with the nations much differently than before they were formed:

Acts 14:16

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

So, it really makes no sense to create multiple dispensations before the law.

Dispensation Quick Facts: Promise

Began: When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3

Ended: When Israel was given the old testament written law

Law & Priesthood: Oral law with informal priesthood (heads of households) and random prophets

Agency: Man

Transition: From the creation of man until the fall (Genesis 1-2)

Books: Genesis and Job (Genesis 12-50 and Job contain transition)

2.3.4 The Next Dispensation: The Kingdom

The dispensation that follows the dispensation of grace is the kingdom. However, the dispensation of grace interrupted the transition into the kingdom. It makes sense that what was interrupted will continue.

Side Study 2.6: The Transition into the Kingdom – Part 2

Paul makes it clear what will immediately follow the end of the dispensation of grace:

2 Thessalonians 2:6-10

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.



- 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [will let], until he be taken out of the way.
- 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:
- 9 [Even him], whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,
- 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

When the body of Christ is gone, the antichrist will be revealed and the tribulation will follow.

God made a point of completing the bible while Paul (and others) were still alive. What he wanted believers to know when the transition continues, he has already written down in advance. Many teachings in *Matthew* to *John* and *Acts* 1-8 will still have some value. *Hebrews* to *Revelation* will be applicable at that time.

Paul acknowledged the kingdom:

Colossians 2:16-17

- 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days]:
- 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ.

Paul mentioned Israel's ceremonial holydays, highlighting that we are not observing such things today. However, they were a shadow of what is to come. They will come back in their fullness during the kingdom.

All Israel will be saved at that time with the law written in their hearts:

Hebrews 8:10-11

- 10 For this [is] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:
- 11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

They will have the ability to keep the law perfectly through the new covenant and the Holy Ghost. Therefore, this Israel will be different than the one during the law and the prophets and the transition into the kingdom.

God will be working through Israel again:

Zechariah 8:23

- 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days [it shall come to pass], that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard [that] God [is] with you.

The other nations will be under the law:

Zechariah 14:16-17

- 16 And it shall come to pass, [that] every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.
- 17 And it shall be, [that] whoso will not come up of [all] the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

Dispensation Quick Facts: Kingdom

Begins: When Jesus returns and establishes the kingdom

Ends: After the final rebellion preceding the great white throne judgment

Law & Priesthood: A subset of Israel's written law and teachings that Jesus gave; Israel will be a priesthood

Agency: Redeemed Israel

Transition: From John the Baptist until Christ returns; This has been interrupted by the dispensation of grace

Books: none; transition into: *Matthew* to *John*, *Acts* 1-8, *Hebrews* to *Revelation*

We can now look at the 4 dispensations that we have defined and the ages that they accompany. Figure 2.2 advances what we defined in Figure 1.2. There is a dispensation that aligns with each (major) age that Paul defined. A few judgments are shown simply to demonstrate that judgments do not need to start dispensations.

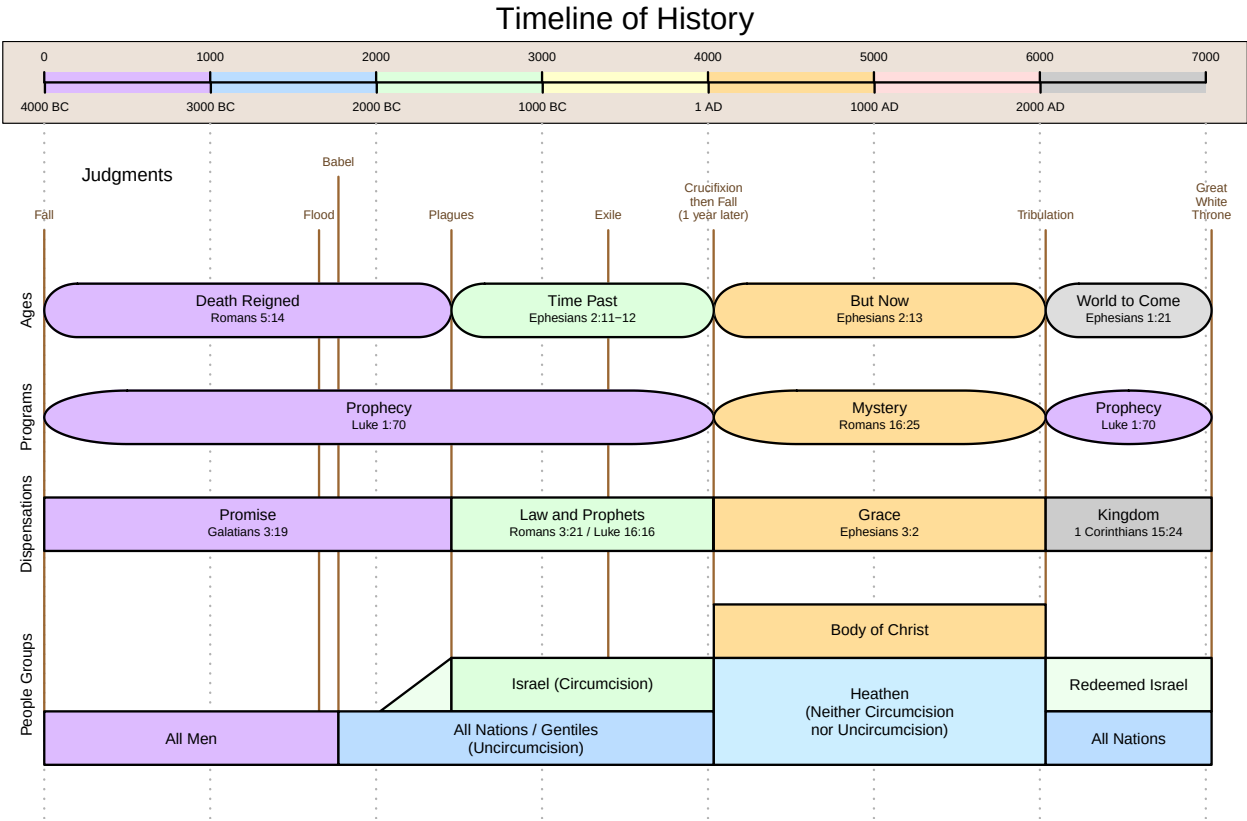


Figure 2.2: This figure adds to what was presented in Figure 1.2. The dispensations defined in this chapter align with the ages defined in Chapter 1. The people groups might reflect how man is viewed in the different dispensations (one transition is shown).

You should give some thought to the people groups portion of the figure. Under the dispensation of promise, there is a change from “All Men” to “All Nations”, but nothing really changed with respect to how God was dealing with man. God used random men to speak through. There is clearly no new agency formed throughout *Genesis*. However, a transition begins during this time and it takes about 400 years for it to complete. Why? Because God was forming a nation from one man and it took time for Abraham’s descendants to multiply. No other transition is this long.

There is a clear change in administration when the law is given to Israel. The transition into the kingdom was not supposed to be very long (possibly 40 years). The transition into grace began with Paul receiving revelation over time. This took approximately 35 years. And finally, the transition into promise may have been less than a week!³

2.3.5 The Last Dispensation: Fullness of Times

Ephesians 1:10
10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; [even] in him:

Paul tells us about “the end” that leads up to this:

³We won’t study that, but creation ended on the seventh day and Adam and Eve likely fell on the fifth day of the next week. Why? Because 5 represents death – Jesus died on the same day of the week!



1 Corinthians 15:23-28

- 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.
24 Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.
25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.
26 The last enemy [that] shall be destroyed [is] death.
27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under [him, it is] manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.
28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

It isn't clear if this dispensation will align with an age. It might be an age that never ends.

Conclusion

Today, we live in the dispensation of grace during which there is no law. The promise, the law and the prophets, and the kingdom all have some works of the law present. It makes sense that there are 4 dispensations leading up to the end. When someone tells you that there are more (or less), make sure they justify it with scripture rather than an argument from man's wisdom.



The Many Gospels

Gospel is a word that is very much misunderstood by Christians because it is plagued by religious tradition. Let's consider the definition in the 1828 Webster's Dictionary:

The history of the birth, life, actions, death, resurrection, ascension and doctrines of Jesus Christ; or a revelation of the grace of God to fallen man through a mediator, including the character, actions, and doctrines of Christ, with the whole scheme of salvation, as revealed by Christ and his apostles. This gospel is said to have been preached to Abraham, by the promise, "in thee shall all nations be blessed." Gal 3:8.

It is called the gospel of God. Rom 1:1. It is called the gospel of Christ. Rom 1:16. It is called the gospel of salvation. Eph 1:13.

After reading this chapter, you might agree with my assessment: The dictionary definition is not very good.

Strong's concordance suggests that *gospel* means *good news or tidings*. It provides a better definition, but, like the dictionary, it is not a source of truth.

Side Study 3.1: Concordance Entries for *Gospel* (Advanced Study)

As you mature in studying the bible, you will want to learn how to use a concordance. A concordance shows how a Hebrew or Greek word is translated into English. I won't describe a concordance further, but will just demonstrate its usage.

If you search for the word *gospel*, you will see that it only occurs in the new testament. It is translated from 3 different Greek words. Let's see them.

***euangelizō* (G2097)**

From G2095 and G32; to announce good news ("evangelize") especially the gospel:—declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).

G2097 essentially tells us what *gospel* means in the bible: *good news or tidings*.

***euangelion* (G2098)**

From the same as G2097; a good message, i.e., the gospel:—gospel.

G2098 is always translated as *gospel*, and, so, it does not really tell us more about the word.

***proeuangelizomai* (G4283)**

Middle voice from G4253 and G2097; to announce glad news in advance:—preach before the gospel.

G4283 occurs only once and is translated *preached before the gospel*.

Gospel occurs one other time and appears as a word inserted by the translators. That means that it does not come from a Greek word and has no concordance number. It will appear in brackets (or italicized, depending upon the publisher):

1 Corinthians 9:17

17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation [of the gospel] is committed unto me.

A concordance is never used to correct the translation, but it can give us better understanding of the words used.

3.1 What Does *Gospel* Mean in the Bible?

While the concordance gives us much better insight as to what *gospel* means compared to the dictionary, we should still turn to the ultimate source of truth: the *King James Bible*. Other bibles are not God's word, but that is a topic that I will not address here (see *The English Bible* study guide [7]).

Here are the definitive examples that tell us what the word means:

Luke 4:18

18 The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

That verse quotes this verse:

Isaiah 61:1

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound;

Where *Luke* says "gospel", *Isaiah* says "good tidings". So, *gospel* really does appear in the old testament through its definition.

Many improperly teach that *gospel* means *a salvation message*. It can mean that but often does not. As Jesus went around Israel during his ministry, he was preaching to both believing and unbelieving Jews. But they had something new to believe and works to perform to demonstrate their faith and obedience. If you looked in the old testament at the word translated as *good tidings* in Isaiah 61:1, you would learn more about that word. It wasn't a salvation message.

Here is a passage where the word translated *gospel* is translated *preach*:

Luke 4:43

43 And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

Jesus was saying that he was preaching the good news that the kingdom was at hand (or near). The next verse says something similar:

Luke 8:1

1 And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve [were] with him,

Here, the word often translated as *gospel* is translated as *glad tidings*, which is similar to what we saw in the old testament. And those glad tidings were about the kingdom. Not only were they preached, but they were shown.

Luke 7:22

22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.

3.2 Is There More Than One Gospel?

Is there more than one gospel in the bible? Unfortunately, many Christians will say "no". Or, they will say "Yes—one true gospel and many false gospels". This is a good example of the maturity of the church today. For those that do not understand, they might reference this verse:



Galatians 1:6-9

- 6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:
 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.
 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.
 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

This comes from Paul and his message was that there was only one gospel available to his audience. Some were being deceived by false teachers. Many times, the gospel that they were hearing was another, but it was not *good news* to them.

Let's see that the bible clearly teaches that there is more than one gospel:

Galatians 2:2

- 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

First, Paul mentioned "that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles". He was clarifying the gospel that he preached because there was another.

Galatians 2:7-9

- 7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;
 8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)
 9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Verse 7 references two gospels: (1) gospel of the uncircumcision and (2) gospel of the circumcision. Most bad teachers want to say "gospel to" rather than "gospel of", and then claim that it is the same message to two different audiences. That clearly does not make sense.

The word *gospel* occurs 104 times in the new testament. Paul used the word 75 times. He used the word so frequently because he needed to highlight the distinction between his gospel and any other. If you search the bible for "gospel of", you should find the following results:

1. (the blessed) God [also: his Son]
2. the kingdom (of God) [also: Jesus Christ, the Son of God]
3. (our Lord Jesus) Christ [also: the grace of God / peace / your salvation]
4. the circumcision
5. the uncircumcision

If you think these are all synonymous, then you need to study better. There is even one more beyond these.

3.3 The Gospel of God

The gospel of God is mentioned by both Paul and Peter. If you understand how to rightly divide the scripture, you might wonder how that could be: How could prophecy and mystery share a gospel? It is mainly because it is in the old testament. Paul is the one that clearly defines it:

Romans 1:1-4

- 1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called [to be] an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,
 2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)
 3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;
 4 And declared [to be] the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

Verse 2 says that this gospel was given previously by the prophets, meaning in the old testament. There are two key elements of this gospel given in verses 3 and 4:

1. Jesus is of the seed of David according to the flesh, and



2. Jesus is declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection.

Let's see where these elements are given in the old testament, starting with the first:

Isaiah 9:6-7

- 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
- 7 Of the increase of [his] government and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Jeremiah 23:5-6

- 5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.
- 6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this [is] his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jeremiah 33:15

- 15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

For the second element:

Psalms 16:10

- 10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Before we investigate this gospel further, let's see that Peter mentions it:

1 Peter 4:17

- 17 For the time [is come] that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if [it] first [begin] at us, what shall the end [be] of them that obey not the gospel of God?

However, this isn't something that he and the other apostles taught before Jesus' resurrection because they did not understand that he had to die (e.g., John 20:9). But, once the apostles were given the Holy Ghost (in John 20:22), they had their understanding of the scriptures opened:

Luke 24:44-46

- 44 And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and [in] the prophets, and [in] the psalms, concerning me.
- 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,
- 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

So, now let's see that Peter preached the two elements right after the ascension at Pentecost by looking at several excerpts from his sermon in Acts 2:

Acts 2:29-30

- 29 Men [and] brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.
- 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

Acts 2:24

- 24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Acts 2:27

- 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Acts 2:31-32

- 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.
- 32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Acts 2:36

- 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Side Study 3.2: What Followed the Gospel of God?

The gospel of God does not tell the recipient to do anything. What we will see is that another gospel followed or was combined with this one. Shortly after Peter preached the gospel of God at Pentecost, he added the gospel of the kingdom:

Acts 2:37-38

- 37 Now when they heard [this], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men [and] brethren, what shall we do?
- 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

So, the believer had to do something. The gospel of the kingdom will be discussed in Section 3.4.

Paul preached the gospel of Christ with the gospel of God:

Acts 16:30-31

- 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
- 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

When asked what to do, Paul didn't say to be baptized—only believe. Paul wasn't sent to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17). The gospel of Christ will be discussed in Section 3.5.

Paul preached the gospel of God right after his salvation experience:

Acts 9:19-20

- 19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.
- 20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Paul says something quite interesting here:

Galatians 1:23

- 23 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

Paul preached the gospel that he once persecuted. That would be the gospel of God. That was not the gospel of Christ; Paul couldn't have persecuted what was not yet known. He also didn't preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Paul preached the gospel of God to both Jews and Gentiles:

Acts 17:1-3

- 1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
- 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
- 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Acts 18:4-5

- 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews [that] Jesus [was] Christ.

This gospel was foundational to all that preached one of the other gospels. See Side Study 3.3 and Side Study 3.4 for examples.

Side Study 3.3: What Did Philip Preach? (Advanced Study)

Philip has two stories in Acts 8. This follows the final rejection of the kingdom in Acts 7 and precedes Saul's conversion in Acts 9. This Philip is not the apostle Philip. He also goes to Samaria, where the apostles apparently had not been yet. The number 8 can symbolize a new beginning. What did Philip preach?

Acts 8:5

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

That doesn't seem to tell us much.

Acts 8:12

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

He obviously is baptizing, so he is preaching the gospel of the kingdom as well. If you read verses 14-17, you will see that the apostles are eventually involved in order to give the Holy Ghost.

Later in the chapter, Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch is reading about Jesus death in the old testament:

Acts 8:32-33

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

Acts 8:35

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

The eunuch had evidently heard some preaching in Jerusalem and so he asked to be baptized:

Acts 8:36-38

36 And as they went on [their] way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, [here is] water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

So, Philip preached the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the kingdom. That is all that he knew.

Side Study 3.4: What Did Peter Preach to Cornelius? (Advanced Study)

Acts 10 has the story of Cornelius' conversion. It is also teaching Peter that something different is going on (like Acts 8 was doing). After Peter's vision, he said this to Cornelius:

Acts 10:34-43

34 Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which [God] sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

- 37 That word, [I say], ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
- 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.
- 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:
- 40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;
- 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, [even] to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
- 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God [to be] the Judge of quick and dead.
- 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

We read of no response by Cornelius, but this happened:

Acts 10:44

- 44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

Paul tells us this with respect to the gospel of God:

Romans 15:16

- 16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

That explains what Peter witnessed.

But what does Peter do next?

Acts 10:47

- 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Peter wanted to do what the gospel of the kingdom required: baptism. He did not yet have understanding that the kingdom on earth was not coming.

Romans 1:9

- 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

3.4 The Gospel of the Kingdom

During his ministry, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom:

Matthew 4:23

- 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Matthew 9:35

- 35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

He also said that it would be preached before his return:

Matthew 24:14

- 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

This has yet to happen.



Why is there *good news* about a kingdom? The gospel of the kingdom focused on the Davidic covenant (see Chapter 11 for details of that covenant). Recall that being descended from David was one of the key elements of the gospel of God. This is why you find many references to David in *Matthew* (compared to the few in *Mark* and *Luke*):

Matthew 1:1
1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
Matthew 1:6
6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her [that had been the wife] of Urias;
Matthew 1:20
20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
Matthew 9:27
27 And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, [Thou] Son of David, have mercy on us.
Matthew 12:23
23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?
Matthew 15:22
22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, [thou] Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.
Matthew 20:30-31
30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, [thou] Son of David.
31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, [thou] Son of David.
Matthew 21:9
9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed [is] he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.
Matthew 21:15
15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,
Matthew 22:42
42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, [The Son] of David.

The kingdom was still the focus of Jesus and the apostles after his resurrection:

Acts 1:6-7
6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?
7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

The Davidic covenant is an unconditional covenant. That means it doesn't require anyone to do anything. The good news was that the kingdom was at hand (or near in time):

Matthew 4:17
17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

In that verse, the people were told to repent. Repent of (or, change your mind about) what? The command to repent had to do with the conditional law (or, Mosaic) covenant (see Chapter 11). This wasn't such good news. Israel's prophetic salvation program incorporated three covenants: The Davidic covenant was built upon the law covenant, which was built upon the Abrahamic covenant.

So, just what did the people need to believe and what did they need to do? This turns out to be a little complicated because the kingdom consists of two components, which are often simplified as a spiritual and physical component. The former is referred to as the "kingdom of God" and the latter is referred to as the "kingdom of heaven". These are more fully discussed in Chapter 12. The brief summary of the elements of the gospel of the kingdom is this:

1. belief that Jesus was the Christ
2. water baptism for the remission of sins
3. keeping all of the commandments until Jesus returns

There was no element concerning the death, burial, and resurrection.

Individual salvation, meaning justification, came solely through believing that Jesus was the Christ. National salvation involved being a righteous nation that kept the law.

3.5 The Gospel of Christ

The gospel of Christ is a phrase only used by Paul, and he uses it 11 times. It should not be confused with the "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" mentioned in Mark 1:1. This gospel was committed to Paul:

1 Corinthians 9:17-18
17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation [of the gospel] is committed unto me.
18 What is my reward then? [Verily] that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

In contrast, the gospel of God was not committed solely to Paul since many others preached it. The gospel of Christ is synonymous with the *grace of Christ*:

Galatians 1:6-7
6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:
7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Paul uses this phrase in the context of it being a gospel and then explicitly says the *gospel of Christ*. Paul also calls this the "gospel of the grace of God":

Acts 20:24
24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

While Luke wrote this, it was Paul who said it. Paul more frequently uses the word *gospel* without following it with the word *of*.

However, the phrase "the gospel of the grace of God" also comes from the fact that Paul said that he had a dispensation for his gospel in 1 Corinthians 9:17. That dispensation is also mentioned here:

Ephesians 3:2
2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:

So, the gospel of the grace of God is preached during the dispensation of grace. Dispensations are discussed in the *Biblical Time* study guide [2].

Like the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ has some elements that were in the old testament:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4
1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The two elements here are:

1. Christ died for our sins, and
2. he was buried and rose again the third day.

Note that these elements are not the same as those in the gospel of God. Let's see these in the old testament starting with the first element:

Isaiah 53:5-12

- 5 But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.
- 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken.
- 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither [was any] deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put [him] to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see [his] seed, he shall prolong [his] days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
- 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, [and] shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore will I divide him [a portion] with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

We need to note that the old testament and, thus, prophecy focused on Israel (e.g., *my people* in verse 8) and not Gentiles. This can be confirmed in Matthew 1:21. However, the mystery part of Paul's message will include Gentiles (that will be shown shortly).

For the second element, we find:

Jonah 1:17

- 17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:40

- 40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Also, throughout *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, there are numerous references to "the third day" (see the *Resurrection* study guide [4] for examples).

The gospel of Christ brought salvation to the Gentiles apart from Israel:

Romans 11:11

- 11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but [rather] through their fall salvation [is come] unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

Ephesians 2:11-13

- 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;
- 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
- 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Paul also makes it clear that the law and works are not part of our sanctification:

Romans 6:14

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 11:6

6 And if by grace, then [is it] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if [it be] of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

See Side Study 2.3 for more discussion on grace.

Paul did not preach this gospel where the kingdom gospel was preached:

Romans 15:19-20

19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.
20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:

While other gospels mention that Christ had to die and was resurrected, only this gospel focuses on the cross and the crucifixion:

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.
18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.
2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God:

Romans 1:16

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 1:18

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Side Study 3.5: Whose Gospel Is It?

As you study, you will find that Paul uses the following phrases: (1) the gospel, (2) my gospel, and (3) our gospel. Sometimes the first form is followed by (1) of God or (2) of Christ. But in the other two cases, just whose gospel is it?

Paul used "my gospel" in *Romans* and *2 Timothy*:

Romans 2:16

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 16:25

25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

2 Timothy 2:8

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

He is the only author and so he referenced the message given to him by Jesus in this way.

Paul used “our gospel” in *2 Corinthians*, *1 Thessalonians*, and *2 Thessalonians*:

2 Corinthians 4:3

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

1 Thessalonians 1:5

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

2 Thessalonians 2:14

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all of these letters, Paul coauthored the letter with someone else. The first verse of each letter named the coauthors.

There may have been a brief period of time where Jews were still getting saved apart from Paul's gospel. The dispensation of grace started with Paul in Acts 7. Yet the Ethiopian eunuch is saved in Acts 8 and Cornelius is saved in Acts 10 without Paul's gospel. But that is occurred because of a transition between dispensations.

Here are some other verses with different “gospel of” phrases that should be equivalent to “gospel of Christ”:

2 Thessalonians 1:8

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Romans 10:15

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Ephesians 1:13

13 In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

3.6 The Gospel of the Circumcision

The gospel of the circumcision is only mentioned once:

Galatians 2:7

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;

It is only mentioned after the kingdom had been rejected in Acts 7. There was still good news to believing Jews even though the kingdom wasn't coming.

The gospel of the circumcision focused on the Abrahamic covenant (see Chapter 11). This too was an unconditional covenant. Just as Jesus was the son of David, he was also the son of Abraham:

Matthew 1:1

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham is only mentioned a few times in *Matthew* (as compared to David):

Matthew 1:2

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

Matthew 3:9

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to [our] father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Matthew 8:11

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 22:31-32

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,
32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Abraham was said to have had a gospel preached to him:

Galatians 3:8

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed.

This isn't about Abraham's salvation. It concerns justification of the heathen, or Gentiles. Romans 4 discusses Abraham's salvation. It also says that he was saved before he was circumcised. So, the gospel of the circumcision has to do with his circumcised descendants, specifically through Isaac and Jacob.

3.7 The Gospel of the Uncircumcision

The gospel of the uncircumcision is only mentioned once:

Galatians 2:7-9

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;
8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)
9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

The *uncircumcision* is clarified to be the *heathen*. This means Gentiles as well as unbelieving Jews, who are excluded from the *circumcision*. In the new testament, *circumcision* refers to the believing Jew:

Romans 2:28-29

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither [is that] circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:
29 But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God.

Once Israel was set aside in Acts 7, God reverted to the promise to Abraham:

Romans 4:9-11

9 [Cometh] this blessedness then upon the circumcision [only], or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.
10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.
11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which [he had yet] being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Today, believing Gentiles are spiritual descendants of Abraham:

Romans 4:16

16 Therefore [it is] of faith, that [it might be] by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

But we are not spiritual descendants of Isaac and Jacob.

The events mentioned in Galatians 2 align with those in Acts 15. In the latter, the apostles essentially abandoned their commission since prophecy had been interrupted. Unbelieving Jews were put into the scope of Paul's ministry. He was already commissioned to the Gentiles [and Jews] (see Acts 9:15) and given a special provocation ministry to the scattered Jews (see Acts 13:2).

Figure 3.1 shows the potential relationships among several of the gospels mentioned in this chapter. Jesus and his apostles clearly preached gospel of the kingdom apart from the gospel of God. Eventually, Jesus began to teach that he had to die and intertwined it with the gospel of God, which was something he already knew. Once the apostles had the Spirit, the two gospels were basically inseparable.

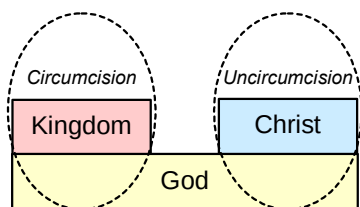


Figure 3.1: The relationships among the 5 “gospel of...” phrases is shown. The gospel of God is the foundation and contains information from the old testament. The gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of Christ are each built upon it. The gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of God are collectively called the gospel of the circumcision. The gospel of Christ and the gospel of God are collectively called the gospel of the uncircumcision.

While Paul defines the gospel of God for us, he doesn't really preach it alone. He essentially shows us that there was an aspect of his gospel that was already known and an aspect that was not. The part that was known was also key to the kingdom gospel. The gospels of the circumcision and uncircumcision are not really new; they simply provide an easy way to contrast what the two programs, prophecy and mystery, were preaching.

3.8 The Everlasting Gospel

The everlasting gospel is mentioned only once:

Revelation 14:6-7

6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,
7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

In the vision shown to the apostle John, this comes after the 7 trumpets and before the 7 bowls. So, Israel will be a redeemed nation at that point. That gospel is to the Gentiles that remain. It is called *everlasting* because it has always been true.

Side Study 3.6: Fearing God

Let's see some verses that relate to fearing God:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man.
14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil.

Psalms 111:10

10 The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do [his commandments]: his praise endureth for ever.

Proverbs 1:7

7 The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of knowledge: [but] fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 9:10

10 The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [is] understanding.

Job 1:1

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name [was] Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

Cornelius was a Gentile that feared God:

Acts 10:2

2 [A] devout [man], and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

Paul addressed Jews and God-fearing Gentiles:

Acts 13:16

16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with [his] hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

Acts 13:26

26 Men [and] brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

Someone could fear God without becoming a proselyte to Israel. Someone that feared God would likely have some understanding of what he was doing and would bless Israel according to the Abrahamic covenant. The Roman centurion is a good example of such a man (see Luke 7:1-10).

This is the everlasting kingdom promised in *Daniel*:

Daniel 2:44

44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, [but] it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Daniel 7:27

27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom [is] an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Galatians 1:8

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Gentiles will enter into the kingdom via the *sheep and goats* judgment given in Matthew 25:31-46. This will reflect the Abrahamic covenant: I will bless those that bless you and curse those who curse you. This will be a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham.

Conclusion

Gospel means *glad tidings*. It can mean a salvation message, although it doesn't say what the message is. The bible clearly teaches that there is more than one gospel, although there is only one gospel today, during the dispensation of grace.

No gospel, or salvation message, is communicated in one verse. Often many verses are necessary to understand salvation. "Believing in/on Jesus" is not any gospel. Many will reference this:



Acts 16:30-31

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

This doesn't detail what to believe. Paul's doctrine is not in *Acts*. He didn't write the book. His doctrine (i.e., what to believe) is in *Romans* to *Philemon*. The justification doctrine is predominately in *Romans*.

Gospels outside the dispensation of grace are more complicated and involve works to demonstrate faith.

Apostles

Some might think that a disciple and an apostle are the same thing. As we will see in some later verses, there were some people that were both disciples and apostles. However, they can be mutually exclusive. A *disciple* is a pupil, or student. An *apostle* is someone sent to carry out the business of the one who sent him. During Jesus' ministry, those that were apostles were also disciples. But not all disciples were apostles. The 1828 *Webster's Dictionary* has this definition for apostle:

A person deputed to execute some important business; but appropriately, a disciple of Christ commissioned to preach the gospel.

Paul is an example of an apostle who was not a disciple. As you mature, you will learn that the dictionary is often incorrect.

We will see that Jesus sent out most of the apostles other than himself; he, of course, was sent by God. All of the apostles had power and authority to do miraculous things (i.e., signs):

2 Corinthians 12:12

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

It may not be the case that all apostles had the same power and authority. All of these signs validated the message that each delivered. Most apostles saw Jesus personally:

1 Corinthians 9:1

1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

I will highlight some possible exceptions.

Since we must rightly divide prophecy and mystery, we must expect that apostles will end up being divided into these groups as well. To whom the apostles were sent and the message that they were given should likewise be different.

Side Study 4.1: Concordance Entries for *Apostle* (Advanced Study)

If you search for the word *apostle*, you will see that it only occurs in the new testament. It is translated from 2 different Greek words (and one of them is translated *apostleship*). Let's see them.

***apostolos* (G652)**

From G649; a delegate; specially, an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ ("apostle") (with miraculous powers):—apostle, messenger, he that is sent.

While this definition is pretty good, we will see that there were some apostles not commissioned by Jesus—Jesus being one of them. Also, as we should already know, saying "**the** gospel" is very sloppy since there are more than one (and why is it capitalized?).

apostolē (G651)

From G649; commission, i.e., (specially) apostolate:—apostleship.

This word references the office rather than a person in the office.

4.1 Jesus

You might not think that Jesus was an apostle because he isn't called that during his ministry, but. . .

Hebrews 3:1

1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

You will find many verses in the book of *John* that say that God (or, the Father) had sent him, which is part of the definition of *apostle*. You will also find a few verses that say that John the Baptist was also sent by God, but he is never explicitly called an apostle. Perhaps that is because John didn't do any miracles.

But concerning Jesus' apostleship, we particularly note:

John 20:21

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

He was speaking to the 12 apostles and they were sent, or commissioned, with similar instructions that he had (we will see this in the next section). This was said at the end of his ministry, so we should conclude that the commission hasn't changed (here in *John*) from the first commissioning of the 12 three years earlier.

Next, we note this:

Romans 15:8

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises [made] unto the fathers:

Being a minister of the circumcision meant that Jesus only ministered to Israel. Therefore, we find him making this statement:

Matthew 15:24

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

That was amplified when he commissioned the 12 apostles. Jesus obviously did many miraculous things. Many were recorded for us, but even more were not:

John 21:25

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

4.2 The Twelve Apostles

Jesus commissioned 12 primary apostles. We will see in the next section that there were some others. This first passage makes it clear that these 12 were already disciples:

Luke 6:13

13 And when it was day, he called [unto him] his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

And this says a little about what they were to do:

Mark 3:14-15

14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,
15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

Those previous passages will help you not get confused by the next one, which might lead you to believe that disciples and apostles are the same thing:

Matthew 10:1-4

- 1 And when he had called unto [him] his twelve disciples, he gave them power [against] unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.
- 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James [the son] of Zebedee, and John his brother;
- 3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James [the son] of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;
- 4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus appointed 12 apostles to Israel because 12 is the number of Israel (e.g., there are 12 tribes). He gives them fairly detailed instructions:

Matthew 10:5-15

- 5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into [any] city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
- 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- 7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.
- 9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
- 10 Nor scrip for [your] journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.
- 11 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.
- 12 And when ye come into an house, salute it.
- 13 And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.
- 14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.
- 15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

See Chapter 13 to understand the proper meaning of the commission. Many teachers do not respect the distinctions of Israel's program in this commission when it is furthered in Matthew 28:19-20

Side Study 4.2: Other Commission Details (Advanced Study)

There is a lot more said about the apostles' commission, and these details are commonly mistaught. For example, the commission was never expanded beyond Israel:

Matthew 10:23

- 23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

That verse says that the apostles would never finish going through Israel before Jesus returns. Therefore, these verses cannot mean that Gentiles are included:

Matthew 28:19-20

- 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
- 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.

But it may be that others would go out to evangelize the scattered Jews.

Nor is Paul's commission to Gentiles part of this commission (see Section 4.4). Because of the interruption by the dispensation of grace, these apostles eventually abandoned their commission altogether. This occurred in Acts 15, but Paul provided more information about it in Galatians 2:7-9 (this will be shown below).

This is a particularly advanced study, especially when considering the details in the book of *Revelation*.

Side Study 4.3: Replacing Judas

Many improperly teach that Paul should have been Judas' replacement. First, let's see why Judas needed to be replaced:

Matthew 27:3-5

- 3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,
- 4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What [is that] to us? see thou [to that].
- 5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Peter had the authority to choose a replacement (Matthew 16:17-19), as did the other 10 (Matthew 18:18-19). They did this before Pentecost:

Acts 1:15-17

- 15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)
- 16 Men [and] brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.
- 17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

The 11 apostles had the Holy Ghost already, so they did not do this on their own. And this was how the choice was made:

Acts 1:20-26

- 20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.
- 21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,
- 22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.
- 23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.
- 24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all [men], shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,
- 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.
- 26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Later, we will see why Paul was not qualified to be the replacement for a few reasons. Paul acknowledged that there were 12 apostles later in time:

1 Corinthians 15:5

- 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

Paul's letters make it clear that he was sent to the Gentiles and not Israel (although this should not be confused by his provocation ministry of Israel described in Subsection 4.5.1).

4.3 The Seventy Apostles

Luke tells us about 70 other apostles:¹

¹ If you have a corrupt bible, this next verse says 72. See *The English Bible* study guide [7] for more information.



Luke 10:1

1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

They were not called apostles here, but they had similar instructions as the 12:

Luke 10:3-12

3 Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.
 4 Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way.
 5 And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace [be] to this house.
 6 And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.
 7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.
 8 And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you:
 9 And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.
 10 But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,
 11 Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.
 12 But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

But, here is where we get confirmation that they were apostles:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Verse 7 is referring to these 70 since the 12 were mentioned in verse 5.

Since 70 typifies the Gentile nations, it might be that this group was intended to reach the scattered Jews. Since prophecy has been interrupted, all of the apostles have died. It might be that the 144,000 in Revelation 7 could end up with this task. But they aren't called apostles, nor is their assignment detailed.

4.4 Paul

Paul emphasized his apostleship in almost every letter he wrote. Of his 13 letters, the 4 exceptions are: *Philippians*, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, and *Philemon* (all of these letters have co-authors, but that is probably not the reason for the omission). But those were all written to mature believers, who probably understood his office.

Side Study 4.4: Paul's Conversion

Paul's conversion is described in Acts 9, 22, and 26. You might want to read the large passages in each chapter. Here are a few excerpts to highlight his commission to the Gentiles:

Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:
 16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Acts 22:21

21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Acts 26:16-18

- 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
- 17 Delivering thee from the people, and [from] the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
- 18 To open their eyes, [and] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Paul made it clear that he was the apostle of the Gentiles:

Romans 11:13

- 13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

An apostle has an office.

1 Timothy 2:7

- 7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, [and] lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

2 Timothy 1:11

- 11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

Acts 9:15 also mentioned that Paul would be a witness before the children of Israel. This will be highlighted later in Subsection 4.5.1. It is also made more explicit in Acts 15, which is highlighted by this verse:

Galatians 2:7-9

- 7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;
- 8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)
- 9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

The gospel of the uncircumcision is the gospel of the Gentiles. But, the agreement was that Paul would go to the heathen, which was both Gentiles and unbelieving Jews.

Side Study 4.5: Why Paul Can't Replace Judas

When Judas was replaced by Matthias in Acts 1, Paul wasn't a believer. This is demonstrated in Acts 9:

Acts 9:4-5

- 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
- 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Paul didn't recognize Jesus' voice, like a believer should have:

John 10:4

- 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

He obviously didn't meet the qualifications given for a replacement in Acts 1. Also, Paul was forbidden from participating in the kingdom program:

Galatians 1:13

13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

1 Timothy 1:13

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did [it] ignorantly in unbelief.

Matthew 12:31-32

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy [against] the [Holy] Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the [world] to come.

So, Jesus said that whosoever would blaspheme the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven in the prophetic program (i.e., this world or the world to come). Paul did that at the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. He could not be an apostle to Israel.

Right division would also easily disqualify Paul from being an apostle to Israel: He had a different commission with a different gospel to a different audience.

4.5 Other Apostles

We find a few other apostles mentioned during the dispensation of grace. It is not clear that all of these saw Jesus (if so, it wasn't recorded in scripture).

4.5.1 Barnabas and Paul

As you are read the book of *Acts*, you come across this verse:

Acts 14:4

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

The story at this point concerns Barnabas and Paul, but we only know of Paul as an apostle. Is Barnabas the other? Well, you get confirmation a few verses later:

Acts 14:14

14 [Which] when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard [of], they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

So, you have to ask yourself: When was Barnabas commissioned? If you study, you will understand that he was already part of the kingdom church (see Acts 4:36). What does he have to do with Gentiles? Well, nothing directly. But pay attention to the previous chapter:

Acts 13:2-4

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid [their] hands on them, they sent [them] away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

Barnabas and Paul have been given a special ministry to provoke the Jews. This commissioning comes via the Holy Ghost rather than from Jesus. Paul tells us about this further:

Romans 11:11-14

11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but [rather] through their fall salvation [is come] unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

12 Now if the fall of them [be] the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?



- 13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:
 14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation [them which are] my flesh, and might save some of them.

Throughout *Acts*, Paul usually went to the synagogues first.

Acts 17:1-2

- 1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

1 Corinthians 9:20

- 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

This is why Paul did many miracles (i.e., signs are for the Jews). Did Barnabas do any? Well, none are recorded. After Paul and Barnabas split, Barnabas continued his apostleship with Mark (see Acts 15:36-40).

4.5.2 Apostles in the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

- 28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.
 29 [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all workers of miracles?
 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

Ephesians 4:11

- 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Ephesians 3:5

- 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

Paul's letters make it clear that there were other apostles besides him. No details are given because the scripture focuses on Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles. It would make sense that they were given the same instructions as Paul. While Ephesians 4:11 indicates that Jesus gave some to be apostles, the commissioning may have come through the Spirit (like it did for Barnabas):

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

- 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.
 8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
 10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another [divers] kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:
 11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

While apostleship isn't mentioned there, there is much commonality with the list later in the chapter (verses 28-30 above). We should also understand that the gifts of the Spirit are not being given today. So, there are no apostles now.

4.6 False Apostles

We will note that there were also false apostles:

Revelation 2:2

- 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

2 Corinthians 11:13

13 For such [are] false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

Those that went amongst the Jews taught error concerning Jesus and the kingdom. Those that went amongst the body of Christ and the heathen typically taught that the law was part of the salvation message. Neither were sent out by Jesus (nor by the Holy Ghost).

Summary

Table 4.1 summarizes the apostles, their audiences, and their gospels (refer to Figure 3.1 and the surrounding text to understand the subtleties around these names). Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy were only sent to lost Israel. This excluded the Gentiles.

Table 4.1: Summary of the Apostles

Apostle	Sent To	Gospel
Jesus	Israel	Kingdom
The Twelve	Israel	Kingdom
The Seventy	Israel	Kingdom
Paul	Heathen	Christ
Barnabas and Paul	Lost Jews	Christ
Body of Christ Apostles	Heathen	Christ

Paul was initially sent to the Gentiles. Lost Jews were added in a separate commission with Barnabas. This combination was formalized in Acts 15 with the term *heathen* (also, in the dispensation of grace, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile). Barnabas continued without Paul, evidently only going to lost Jews. The instructions concerning other apostles in the body of Christ are not given, but are assumed to be the same as Paul's instructions. The distinctions among all of the apostles are clear and should be respected. To mix them is a great error.

The Many Baptisms (planned)



The Churches (planned)



Part II

Other Distinctions

7 In Christ (planned)	51
8 For Many or For All (planned)	52
9 Fulfilling the Law (planned)	53
10 Was God a Respector of Persons? (planned)	54
11 Covenants and Testaments (planned)	55
12 The Two Kingdoms (planned)	56
13 The Commission (planned)	57

In Christ (planned)



For Many or For All (planned)



Fulfilling the Law (planned)



Was God a Respector of Persons? (planned)



Covenants and Testaments (planned)



The Two Kingdoms (planned)



The Commission (planned)



Part III

Appendices

A The Need for the Right Bible	59
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A

The Need for the Right Bible

The majority of Christians are babes in Christ. Like a real child, they don't know that and cannot be told that. If it is true for you, you can use that as an opportunity to mature. Or, you can cast this reproof aside and continue on in whatever you are doing.

A few necessary steps for becoming very mature are:

- Getting the right bible,
- learning to rightly divide, and
- learning how to study advanced topics.

I will not devote much space to these topics since this is not what the book is about. But it will help you see (1) why you have never heard what is in this book before and (2) why you may have trouble receiving what it teaches. Believe me: it will be easier to get mad and toss this book aside!

There is only one Bible in English today, and it has been around for over 400 years. It's called the *King James Bible* and not the "King James Version". If you don't understand the issues concerning the Bible, this demonstrates your immaturity. If you misunderstand the issues concerning the Bible, perhaps you are an older person that is still immature. If you are willing to take note that there is a bible issue, you can look into that and mature. This appendix will only highlight some of the issues; it will not teach the fullness of the topic.

God promised that he would preserve his word. If you believed a man that said that we cannot have God's pure word today, then you've made the wrong decision and believed a liar. Once you believe that God has preserved his word, you'll understand that it can be translated into other languages. Again, this will not be proven here.

God does not need multiple versions of his word in English. It is the devil who provides a bible buffet. If you use the phrase "King James Only" to accuse someone that agrees with what I am saying, that too highlights that you don't understand the issue. The *King James Bible* is the English bible that comes from the correct source text. There were English bibles before it; there have been none after it.

You have the freedom to use a corrupt bible. I started my Christian life using one. If you use the wrong Bible, you are not going to understand some of the concepts that are critical to understanding the creation. There are several examples below.

A.1 The Prophets or Isaiah?

The simplest example of showing that other bibles have errors is to look at:

Mark 1:2-3	KJB
2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	
3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	

This passage quotes two prophets. Verse 2 quotes Malachi 3:1. Verse 3 quotes Isaiah 40:3. However, the *New International Version* (NIV), like many bad bibles, says:



Mark 1:2-3	NIV
2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" [a]___	
3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" [b]	
footnotes: [a] Malachi 3:1, [b] Isaiah 40:3	

This is a glaring error. The original Greek text is wrong because it has been corrupted. You may feel that you are smart enough to look past problems like this, but there will be other things that you don't know to look past.

A.2 Dispensations

It is hard to understand and study dispensations using bibles that don't have the word. Do other bibles have the equivalent of the word? I don't think so, but you decide for yourself. Let's see the KJB verses that have *dispensation* in them and then the corresponding NIV and *New King James Version* (NKJV). We will see that NIV never translates using the word *dispensation*. The NKJV, which is supposedly improving on the KJB, moves away from the word on 2 of the 4 occasions. This obviously does not make sense in the big picture.

1 Corinthians 9:17	
KJB	For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation [of the gospel] is committed unto me.
NIV	If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.
NKJV	For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

The move to *stewardship* will blur the distinction made between what Luke wrote and what Paul wrote.

Ephesians 1:10	
KJB	That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; [even] in him:
NIV	to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
NKJV	that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Ephesians 3:2	
KJB	If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward:
NIV	Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,
NKJV	if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Colossians 1:25	
KJB	Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;
NIV	I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—
NKJV	of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

So, the NIV has used different English words in all 4 verses. The NKJV uses *dispensation* twice and *stewardship* twice. The latter makes studying more difficult; the former makes it almost impossible. Most corrupt bibles are like the NIV in their inconsistent translation. Of course, these bibles aren't God's word anyway.

A.3 Studying Advanced Bible Topics

Once you have the right bible and you know how to rightly divide, you need to learn how to study and not just read. I'm going to be more helpful here since we will be doing that in this book. I will demonstrate how to study in a



few areas of trying to understand an advanced topic.

Ecclesiastes 12:12-13

- 12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books [there is] no end; and much study [is] a weariness of the flesh.
- 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man.

Verse 12 tells you that studying is a lot of work; it will wear you out. Verse 13 says that you need to read this whole book and not quit part way through. Next, the bible is going to tell you how to study!

Isaiah 28:9-10

- 9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? [them that are] weaned from the milk, [and] drawn from the breasts.
- 10 For precept [must be] upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, [and] there a little:

In order to grow up (and not be a babe drinking milk), you need to learn how to study topics where the verses are scattered.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14

- 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.
- 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.
- 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
- 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.

This confirms what *Isaiah* said: we compare spiritual things with spiritual. The bible defines what words mean by context. Sometimes you find the definition of a word elsewhere or by reading a group of verses. The Holy Ghost doesn't give you understanding by simply reading. It gives understanding by reading, re-reading, and further studying. Then the "aha!" moment might come. My explanations might "click in place" for you or they might not. If not, then you have work to do (rather than concluding that I am wrong).

2 Timothy 4:3-4

- 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
- 4 And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Babes in Christ have itching ears. They want to be told what to believe and they want those things to be miraculous! They want to be part of the big crowd. But God's word often brings you into isolation from the larger group.

Proverbs 29:1

- 1 He, that being often reproved hardeneth [his] neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

As you hear the truth and reject it, you harden your heart. You will see a lot of scriptures in this book. They might not make much sense at first. Studying will cause you to look at the verses in your bible and pondering them over time.



Reference Materials

All completed e-books are available via <https://thechurchoforlando.org>.

- [1] *American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster, 1828; this dictionary is in the *e-Sword* application; see also <https://webstersdictionary1828.com>
- [2] *Biblical Time*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 9/7/25
- [3] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 2: Intermediate Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 9/7/25
- [4] *Resurrection*, Tom Wilson, e-book; Second Edition, Revision A, 8/30/25
- [5] *Ruth*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, Revision A, 8/30/25
- [6] *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, J. Strong, 1890; this concordance is in the *e-Sword* application
- [7] *The English Bible*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 6/3/25
- [8] *The Revelation of God*, Tom Wilson, e-book; Draft Edition, 1/19/25 (first edition coming soon)

Index of Bible Verses

This index of bible verses is provided so that you can quickly find where passages appear. The index is organized by book name. Each book name is followed by an ordered list of chapters, followed by the verse(s) cited. Each reference is followed by the page(s) on which it appears. In the soft copy, the page numbers are hyperlinks. Boldface page numbers, if any, refer to references to verses rather than quoted verses.

1 Corinthians

1:14-15 – 6
1:17 – 6, **27**
1:17-18 – 33
1:18 – 33
2:1-2 – 33
2:7-8 – 3
2:11-14 – 61
3:2 – 5
9:1 – 39
9:17 – 10, 14, 24, 60
9:17-18 – 31
9:20 – 46
10:27-29 – 12
12:7-11 – 46
12:27 – 16
12:28-30 – 46
15:1-4 – 31
15:3-8 – 43
15:5 – 42
15:23-28 – 22

1 Peter

4:17 – 26

1 Thessalonians

1:5 – 34

1 Timothy

1:13 – 45
2:7 – 44

2 Corinthians

3:13 – 8
4:3 – 34
11:13 – 47
12:12 – 39

2 Peter

1:21 – 2

2 Thessalonians

1:8 – 34
2:6-10 – 19
2:14 – 34

2 Timothy

1:11 – 44
2:8 – 34
2:15 – 2
3:16 – 5
4:3-4 – 61

Acts

1:6-7 – 30
1:15-17 – 42
1:20-26 – 42
2:24 – 26
2:27 – 26
2:29-30 – 26
2:31-32 – 27
2:36 – 27
2:37-38 – 27
2:38 – 6
3:19 – 7
3:20-21 – 2
4:36 – **45**
7 – **17**
7:8 – 17
8:5 – 28
8:12 – 28
8:32-33 – 28
8:35 – 28
8:36-38 – 28

- 9:4-5 – 44
 9:15 – **36**
 9:15-16 – 43
 9:19-20 – 27
 10:2 – 37
 10:11-15 – 12
 10:34-43 – 28
 10:44 – 29
 10:47 – 29
 13:2 – **36**
 13:2-4 – 45
 13:16 – 37
 13:26 – 37
 14:4 – 45
 14:14 – 45
 14:16 – 19
 15:36-40 – **46**
 16:30-31 – 27, 38
 17:1-2 – 46
 17:1-3 – 27
 18:4-5 – 27
 19:4 – 6
 20:24 – 31
 22:21 – 43
 26:16-18 – 44
- Colossians
- 1:25 – 10, 14, 60
 1:25-27 – 3
 2:13 – 7
 2:16-17 – 20
 3:11 – 16
- Daniel
- 2:44 – 37
 7:27 – 37
 9:27 – **17**
- Deuteronomy
- 23:2 – **19**
 25:5-6 – **19**
- Ecclesiastes
- 12:12-13 – 61
 12:13-14 – 36
- Ephesians
- 1:10 – 10, 21, 60
 1:13 – 34
 1:22-23 – 16
 2:7 – 8
 2:8-9 – 15, 33
 2:11 – 17
 2:11-13 – 8, 32
 2:12 – 17
 3:2 – 10, 14, 31, 60
 3:2-7 – 3
 3:5 – 46
 4:11 – 46
 4:32 – 7
- Exodus
- 34:6 – 14
- Galatians
- 1:6-7 – 31
 1:6-9 – 25
 1:8 – 37
 1:13 – 45
 1:16 – 16
 1:23 – 27
 2:2 – 25
 2:7 – 34
 2:7-9 – 25, 35, **41**, 44
 2:9 – 16
 3:8 – 35
 3:12 – 15
 3:16 – 18
 3:19 – 18
 3:21 – 18
 5:4 – 15, **16**
- Genesis
- 2:16-17 – 11
 3:15 – 18
 4:3-5 – **19**
 6:8 – 14
 7:2 – **19**
 8:20 – **19**
 9:3-4 – 11
 9:22 – **19**
 9:25 – **19**
 10:5 – 19
 11:9 – 19
 14:18 – 19
 15:6 – 7, 14
 22:2-8 – **19**
 26:25 – **19**
 35:14 – **19**
 38:8-9 – **19**
- Hebrews
- 3:1 – 40
 5:12-14 – 5
 8:10-11 – 20
 8:13 – 8
 11:4 – 15, **19**
 11:7 – 15
- Isaiah
- 9:6-7 – 26
 28:9-10 – 61
 40:3 – **59**
 53:5-12 – 32
 61:1 – 24
- James
- 2:21-24 – 7
 2:22 – 15
- Jeremiah
- 23:5-6 – 26
 33:15 – 26
- Job
- 1:1 – 37
 1:5 – **19**

19:25-27 – 18	15:22 – 30
42:8 – 19	15:24 – 40
John	16:17-19 – 42
4:1-2 – 6	18:18-19 – 42
7:19 – 17	20:30-31 – 30
10:4 – 44	21:9 – 30
20:9 – 26	21:15 – 30
20:21 – 40	21:18-21 – 17
20:22 – 26	22:31-32 – 35
21:25 – 40	22:42 – 30
Jonah	24:14 – 29
1:17 – 32	24:34 – 17
4:2 – 14	25:31-46 – 37
Leviticus	27:3-5 – 42
11:2-3 – 12	28:19 – 6
11:2-24 – 19	28:19-20 – 41, 41
18:6-8 – 19	Numbers
20:11 – 19	23:9-10 – 17
Luke	Proverbs
1:70 – 2	1:7 – 37
4:18 – 24	9:10 – 37
4:43 – 24	25:2 – 3
6:13 – 40	29:1 – 61
7:1-10 – 37	Psalms
7:22 – 24	16:10 – 26
8:1 – 24	111:10 – 36
10:1 – 43	Revelation
10:3-12 – 43	2:2 – 46
16:2-4 – 11	14:6-7 – 36
16:16 – 16	Romans
24:44-46 – 26	1:1-4 – 25
Malachi	1:2-3 – 18
3:1 – 59	1:9 – 29
Mark	1:16 – 33
1:1 – 31	2:14-15 – 18
1:2-3 – 59	2:16 – 33
3:14-15 – 40	2:28-29 – 35
Matthew	3:1-2 – 17
1:1 – 30, 34	3:21 – 16
1:2 – 34	3:21-22 – 14
1:6 – 30	3:28 – 15
1:20 – 30	4:2-3 – 7
1:21 – 32	4:3 – 14
3:1-6 – 6	4:6 – 15
3:9 – 35	4:9-11 – 35
4:17 – 30	4:16 – 36
4:23 – 29	5:14 – 8
6:14-15 – 7	6:14 – 15, 33
8:11 – 35	10:15 – 34
9:27 – 30	11:6 – 15, 33
9:35 – 29	11:11 – 32
10:1-4 – 41	11:11-14 – 45
10:5-15 – 41	11:13 – 44
10:23 – 41	15:8 – 40
12:23 – 30	15:16 – 29
12:31-32 – 45	15:19-20 – 33
12:40 – 32	16:25 – 33

16:25-26 – 3
Zechariah

8:23 – 20
14:16-17 – 20



Tom Wilson has assembled numerous scriptures that explain resurrection in the bible. Some that were resurrected died again, but there is a better resurrection. You can understand the signs and types, and the differences between prophecy's resurrection and ours.

There is also an extensive index of scripture references so that you can find where certain passages are discussed in the presentation of the topic. All this information is put at your fingertips because God wants his people to know and understand him.

Do you have faith to believe what God says? Or will you be faint and bow to the common tradition? Prove yourself today!

Look for other books in the "Understanding the Bible" series.