

Understanding Where You Fit in the Plan of God

Introduction

1. Last week we saw a threefold division in Ephesians 2 that serves as a general guide in helping us to rightly divide God's Word.
2. Most **false** doctrine today is **true** doctrine that has been misplaced into the wrong time period. Most people have no clue as to where they fit in the overall plan of God.
3. The Bible can be a very dangerous Book if it is taken out of context and misappropriated.
4. Here is a quick overview of the threefold time line division that we studied last week:
 - **"Time Past"** - God dealt with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentile nations (vs. 11-12). The knowledge and blessing of God would flow to the world through the channel of the nation of Israel.
 - **"But Now"** - Today, Israel enjoys no favored status before God. Jews and Gentiles stand before God on an equal basis. Salvation is being offered to **all** individuals through the finished work of Jesus Christ, and believers are placed into one body. We are living in an unprecedented time of God's grace to the entire world. vs. 13-18
 - **"Ages to Come"** - When the body of Christ is caught up to heaven it will end this time of grace, and the prophesied events of Israel's last days and kingdom on earth will take place. vs. 7
5. Most false doctrine today is true doctrine taken from God's "time past" program or "ages to come" program and then misapplied to today.
6. In this lesson we will seek to give you the tools needed to rightly divide between these three time periods and understand where you fit in the plan of God.

Matthew through John belong in God's "time past" program.

1. One of the biggest mistakes people make is when they go to Christ's earthly ministry to find doctrine for the body of Christ today.

2. They assume that these books are directed to the body of Christ because their Bible index classifies them as "New Testament."
3. It is a tremendous blessing to read of Christ's earthly ministry and to see His love for needy people, His sinless life, and His great wisdom in various situations. There is much we can learn and some wonderful application we can make to our own lives.
 - Of course, the most blessed part of reading the gospels is reading of our Savior's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection which provides eternal life for us.
4. But we must understand the purpose of Christ's earthly ministry. Romans 15:8 states that *"Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God."*
 - Jesus came to minister to His people, Israel. Jesus said in Matthew 15:24, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*
5. Do you remember how Paul defined "time past" in Ephesians 2:11-12? There was a middle wall of partition between Israel and the Gentiles, with Israel enjoying great spiritual privilege. God dealt with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.
6. Is the middle wall of partition still present in Matthew through John? Is there still a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles? Let's examine some pertinent verses.
 - The gospels open with John the Baptist preaching only to Israel the baptism of repentance. **Mark 1:4-5**
 - Christ is born a Jew, circumcised the eighth day, and is said to have come to save *"his people"* from their sins. **Luke 2:21, 1:68-69, 76-77; Matthew 1:21**
 - The twelve are sent **only** to the lost sheep of Israel. **Matthew 10:5-7**
 - A Gentile woman approaches Christ, and He tells her He is only sent to Israel. She recognizes this distinction, and Christ honors her understanding and faith. **Matthew 15:22-28**
 - Jesus tells the woman at the well that *"salvation is of the Jews."* **John 4:22**
 - After His resurrection, Christ tells the twelve to proclaim His resurrection, but they must begin at Jerusalem. It is obvious, the Jew is still enjoying a spiritual advantage even at the end of the gospels. **Luke 24:47**
7. Three important things are happening simultaneously in the gospels:
 - Christ is calling His people, Israel, to repentance.

- Christ is preparing the "little flock" of believing Israel for the future time of wrath and their coming kingdom to earth. So certain parts of the gospels are dealing with the "ages to come."
 - Christ is preparing to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. While believers **today** can clearly **look back** and see this, those living at that time did not understand the necessity of Christ's death. **Matthew 16:21-22; Luke 18:31-34**
8. Can you see now why the four gospels belong in God's "time past" program? Clearly, God is still dealing with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.

The "but now" time of grace that we are enjoying today was not revealed in the four gospels.

1. One of the biggest mistakes people make is when they read the body of Christ today back into the four gospels.
2. As we learned in last week's lesson, today God is not dealing with the world on the basis of a distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.
 - Today, Jews and Gentiles have both been cut off, but grace is being offered based on the complete and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin.
Romans 3:9-10, 22-24, 11:32
 - This grace is being offered on an equal basis. **Romans 10:12-13**
3. This time of grace was a mystery, hidden in God from the foundation of the world. It **was** a secret, but is now revealed. The apostle Paul was the instrument God used to reveal this time of grace. **Ephesians 3:1-9**
4. There is a great division in the Bible between God's "time past" program and God's "but now" program. Although there is some transitional overlapping, the basic dividing line is the saving and commissioning of the apostle Paul in Acts 9. Paul is our apostle. **Romans 11:13**

In Conclusion

1. Here is a brief synopsis to help you to distinguish between God's "time past" and "but now" programs.

- "Time past" program - Salvation and blessing would go to all the nations through the **rise** of the nation of Israel. This plan has been made known since the world began (**Acts 3:20-21**). This plan will find its ultimate fulfillment in the "ages to come." **Isaiah 60:1-5**
 - "But now" program - Salvation and blessing is being offered today to all people through of the **fall** of Israel. This plan was kept secret since the world began, but then revealed through Paul. **Colossians 1:25-26; Romans 16:25**
2. God is offering to this world an undeserved grace period. When it is over, the prophesied "ages to come" will commence.
 3. We do not know when this grace period will end, so may God find us laboring to spread the message of His grace to all people. This is where we fit in the plan of God.

Scroll down to next page for Bible study chart that coincides with this lesson.

