

Three Periods Of Bible History

Every person who studies the Bible has the personal responsibility to carefully and accurately interpret it so as to properly understand the message God has communicated (2 Timothy 2:15). Sadly, there are many who do not do this and twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). One of the essential elements involved in accurately handling the word of God is recognizing the distinctions between various periods of Bible history and how each one applies today.

1) The Patriarchal Age. This period began in Genesis 1 when God created the heavens and earth, including humankind and continued until the giving of the Law of Moses. It is estimated that this period lasted for around 2,500 years. This period was marked by the fact that God often revealed His will directly to the heads of the households (i.e. the patriarchs). Therefore, even during this time prior to a written law from God, these individuals were still told how God expected them to live (Genesis 2:16-17; 4:3-5; 9:1-7; 12:1-3; 22:2). The Bible story reveals (as we will see) that this lasted until the time when God would enter His covenant with the Israelites (the Law of Moses). From that point forward, we no longer see the record of people relying on revelation from God to the heads of the households (patriarchs).

We must recognize that this period of Bible history has ended. We no longer live under the laws and instructions they had been given. Much about this period was pointing forward to the time when God would fulfill the promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). However, we can and should continue to learn about God and from the examples that were given in Scripture during this period (Romans 15:4; Hebrews 11:4-22).

2) The Mosaic Age. This period began when God gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai (beginning in Exodus 20 with the Ten Commandments, 20:1-17) and continued until it was fulfilled and replaced by the law of Christ. It is estimated that this period

lasted for around 1,500 years. This period was marked by the fact that God had revealed one law that was in effect for the entire nation of Israel (who were His special people). These people agreed to enter this covenant with God to keep the commandments He gave to them through Moses (Exodus 24:3-8). This law would be revealed throughout the writings of Moses in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as God would reveal it to him. There were laws given concerning sacrifices that were to be offered, the tabernacle, the priesthood, holy days and festivals, personal conduct, etc. Throughout this period, God would also use prophets to speak to the people (i.e. Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, etc.). In fact, God even sent prophets to other nations (i.e. Jonah).

We must recognize that this period of Bible history has ended. We no longer live under the laws and instructions they had been given (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Galatians 3:19-26; Colossians 2:14-16). Everything about this period continued to point forward to the promised Messiah who would come from the physical lineage of Abraham, who would establish His kingdom forever and His new law. Therefore, this time of the Law of Moses was intended to prepare people for His coming and for faith in Him. In reality, this law could never forgive sins of itself (Hebrews 10:4), was contrary to the people (Colossians 2:14), and was only a shadow of what was to come (Colossians 2:17). However, there are many things we can and should continue to learn from this time (1 Corinthians 10:6-11; Hebrews 11:23-31).

3) The Gospel Age. This period began in Acts 2 after Jesus came into the world, gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sins, was raised from the dead, and ascended to Heaven and will continue until the end of this world when Jesus comes again. This period is marked by the fact that while God has spoken in various ways to people throughout history, He has now spoken through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3)! Jesus Christ (the Messiah) is now reigning as King at the

right hand of God, having fulfilled all the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17-18). Now, He has revealed the gospel (the good news of salvation to everyone through Jesus that reveals the law of Christ people live under today) through the message delivered to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-6). Everything about this new law is superior to the one that had been given to Moses (Hebrews 8:7-13).

We must recognize that this period of Bible history is still ongoing and are the last days (period/age) on this earth. This period is guided by the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2; James 1:22-25). Jesus Christ commands us to do everything in His name (by His authority/with His approval, Colossians 3:17) and according to His pattern (2 Timothy 1:13) revealed in the New Testament. While miraculous gifts and revelations of the Spirit were in effect during New Testament times, they ceased to exist when the perfect revelation of God's will had come (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). We now have this perfect revelation of truth in the completed message of the New Testament (Jude 1:3). This is the law that will be used to judge us when Jesus returns (2 Corinthians 5:10; John 12:48; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 20:11-15)!

A proper understanding of these three periods of Bible history is crucial to a proper understanding of how to apply the words in the Bible today. Ultimately, we should appreciate the opportunity that has been given to people today to understand the will of God as He has revealed it through His Son! This is the only way for us to have the forgiveness of sins and a home in Heaven – if we believe and obey Jesus's message in the New Testament!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?