

The Three Bible Ages

Introduction

1. One of the ways helpful to understanding the Bible is remembering that it is as an inspired historical record of God's dealings with man – it follows a timeline.
 - a. Though the chief value of events recorded in Bible are for our exhortation they are no nonetheless an historical record (1 Cor.10:11).
 - b. The gospel includes the recording and chronology of events surrounding the life and ministry of Christ (Matt.26:13 cp. Eph. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:16).
2. The timeline along which events are recorded is also marked by major, distinctive periods or ages that are important to our understanding not only of the Bible, but of certain doctrinal teachings of the Bible.
 - a. The Hebrew writer makes a distinction between the period in which God spoke to fathers and that in which He speaks to us today (Heb.1:1-2; 2:1-4).
 - b. These are two distinct periods in which God revealed His will to man; one following the other, making two; but there are actually three (Gen.18:19).
3. One reason for some of the false doctrines and religious practices today is the failure to recognize these distinct ages of the Bible; for example.
 - a. It is one of the reasons some today observe the Sabbath as a religious duty.
 - b. It is a reason some use instrumental music in church worship.
 - c. It is why some use the thief on the cross as an argument against the necessity of baptism for salvation.
 - d. Some even attempt to draw parallels with the work of the church and the ministry of Jesus.
4. The two aims of this lesson are to establish the three distinct ages of the Bible (a valuable study in itself) and to consider a few examples where this knowledge is important in establishing doctrine.

I. The Patriarchal Age

A. The Rule of the Fathers

1. The word 'patriarch' is an Anglicization of the Greek form *patriarches* (pat-ree-arkh-ace) and means, 'patriarch, founder of a tribe, progenitor' – Thayer.
 - a. 'Transliteration of the word, from *patria*, family, and *archō*, to rule, the founder of a family' (RWP)
 - b. It is found only three times in the Bible, in the New Testament (Acts 2:29; 7:8-9 & Hebrews 7:4)
 - c. 'The word "patriarch" properly means "the head or ruler of a family"; and then "the founder of a family, or an illustrious ancestor." It was commonly applied to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by way of eminence, the illustrious founders of the Jewish nation' (Barnes).
2. The patriarchal age is period of time between Adam and giving of the Law of Moses, a time when God spoke and revealed His will directly to men, fathers of households, and commonly associated with the figures such as Abraham, Jacob and Isaac.
 - a. These were not just heads and rulers of families; but recipients of the promises and the commandments of God (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:19; Psalm 105:6-15).
 - b. During this period God made known His laws to heads of households; thus, this was a family religion in contrast to what followed.
 - c. The books of Genesis and Exodus comprise the record of patriarchal age (Ex. 24:7-8 cp. Hebrews 9:16-22).

II. The Mosaic Age

A. The Law of Moses

1. The patriarchal age is then followed by the mosaic age, which began at Mount Sinai when God gave to His people His law through Moses (cp. Hebrews 2:1-3).
 - a. The difference between the patriarchal and mosaic ages was that the will of God was made known to a nation through a written law. This was a national religion (Ps. 147:19-20 cp. Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4).
 - b. The Sabbath observance as a religious duty came into force with the Law of Moses, and not, as some claim, with the patriarchs (Nehemiah 9:9-14 cp. Gen. 2:1-3).

- 1) The first we read of its observance is during Israel's time in the wilderness and being fed with manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4-5, 16-30).
 - 2) Just as the Law was only given to Israel, so was the Sabbath, as a sign between them and God to set them apart from other nations (Ezekiel 20:11-12 cp. Exodus 31:13-17).
 - 3) Some like to draw a contrast between the Law of Moses and the Law of God, saying that the account in Genesis represents the Law of God and that in Exodus the Law of Moses, and the former only was done away with. This is a false distinction (Luke 2:22-24 cp. Lev. 12:2-6).
2. Chronologically speaking, the mosaic age lasted for 1500 yrs (from 1560 BC to 33 AD); its record starts at Exodus 20 (24:7-8 to be more precise) and ends at Acts 2.

III. The Christian Age

A. Christianity

1. The Law of Moses, and the mosaic age, came to an end with the death of Christ on the cross and the shedding of His blood (Heb. 9:15-22 cp. Ex. 24:7-8; Rom. 3:25-6).
 - a. The demise of the Law is described in terms of being abolished, put to death, canceled out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:13-14).
 - b. Another false distinction that many like to make is a distinction between the moral and ceremonial parts of the Law, saying that only the ceremonial has been abolished.
 - 1) It is true that the ceremonial, such as the Sabbath observance, was abolished (Col. 2:16-17) – all Sabbath keeping.
 - 2) In stating that Jewish Christians were no longer obligated to keep the Law, Paul chooses one of the Ten Commandments as an example, proving that moral part of the Law was also abolished (Rom. 7:1-7).
 - c. The oldness of the letter is equated with the written Law of Moses and the newness of the Spirit with the law we have through Christ (cp. 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).
 - 1) To mark the end of the patriarchal age, God made His will known to the nation of Israel through Moses; the end of mosaic, He makes His will known through Christ's apostles and prophets (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 3:4-5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8).
 - 2) He who seeks justification by any other means than by what the Spirit teaches is lost (Gal. 5:4-6).
2. In contrast to the national religion of Judaism, it is now the international religion of Christianity that is the authority in religious doctrine and practice (John 14:6).
 - a. Appealing to the thief on the cross as proof against the necessity of baptism for salvation ignores this fact (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38. Rom. 6:1-4 cp. Mk. 2:5).
 - 1) Firstly, when Jesus pardoned the thief on the cross, both were still under the Law of Moses. The Law of Christ had not yet come into force.
 - 2) Secondly, Christ as God has the power to forgive sin – as the forgiveness of sins lies in no one or no thing but God (Dan.9:9).
 - 3) God has made clear how to achieve forgiveness of sins (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pt. 3:21).
 - b. To depend on the use of instrumental music in the Old Testament for its use in church worship today also defies the authority of Christ (Col. 3:16-17).
 - c. The distribution of funds to the poor that occurred during the ministry of Jesus does not constitute authority for church to help non-Christians from its funds (Acts 11:29; Rom. 15:25-27).

Conclusion

1. Though to understand the Bible in terms of these 3 distinct ages is an important knowledge in itself; it is also important when establishing God's will for us today.