

ple in general, or to some specific person? **Third**, when was it spoken? Did it apply only to the situation of the infant church (as in the case of the use of miracles to confirm the spoken word), or to all of the Christian Age? **Fourth**, why was it spoken? Was God revealing some specific truth or guidelines, for a particular age or situation or person?

Surely by now you are beginning to discover if God is speaking to you through His word, or if the message is to someone else. Answering these questions should enable you to know what God wants you to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

To help you in your study, you can get a Bible dictionary to define words, a Bible concordance to list more, or even all, of the verses on the subject you are studying; you can get commentaries and other books and materials that discuss the subjects and Scriptures under consideration.

Now, when you read and study the Bible, keeping all of these things in mind, you will find it much easier to understand God's word. As you study, you must be prayerful that you will hunger for **the truth**, and that you will accept that truth as you learn it, no matter what it costs you.

Another thing to keep in mind is that Satan and his workers would put all kinds of stumbling blocks in the way, to blind you, to deceive you, to make you think it is too difficult to learn God's

will. Don't allow him to do that! He will try to have you believe that everyone reads the Bible differently, and whatever you believe is all right. But 2 Peter 1:20 says that we cannot have a "private" interpretation of Scripture. Rightly divided and understood, its message is the same for everyone.

In the Bible, our Lord has revealed Himself to the world, telling of His coming, of His life, and of His death, burial, and resurrection. The gospel is the good news of salvation for those who will believe in God, repent of their sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized. The New Testament tells of the church, the spiritual body of Christ and how the Lord saves those who obey the gospel (Mark 16:16) and adds them to His church (Acts 2:47).

May God help us to read and study His word, rightly dividing it, so that we can know His will and obey it, to have the hope of eternal life.

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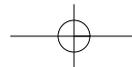
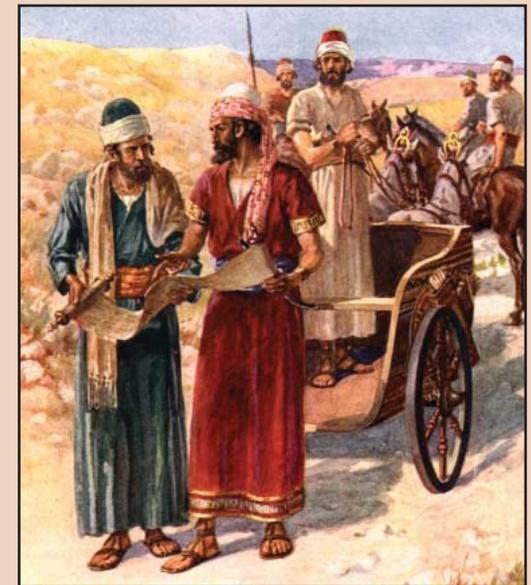
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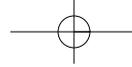
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Rightly Dividing the Word

J.C. Choate





Rightly Dividing the Word

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Many become confused when they read the Bible because they may open it to any book, chapter, and verse, and think that the Lord is personally speaking to them. In doing this, they may conclude that God would want them to build an ark, offer animal sacrifices, or go to Jerusalem once a year to worship. Others are convinced that they are to worship on the Sabbath Day, give tithes of their income, and keep the “Ten Commandments”. Of course, their problem is that they are not *rightly dividing the word*.

The Apostle Paul said, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). If one is to know God’s will, it is *a must* to study His word, but one may study the Bible and still be confused and not know what to do. As Paul said, the key is to *rightly divide the word*. But what does he mean?

We must realize that the Bible was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years! Surely, not all of it was written and directed to you and me — and it was not. So, let’s look into this matter of “rightly dividing”.

To begin with, the word “Bible” means “the Book” or “the book of books”. The Bible actually consists of 66 separate books, grouped into two major divisions, the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament”. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, covering two major periods of time. The first period is called the “Patriarchal Age”, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing to the time of Moses, about twenty-five hundred years. During this period of time God spoke directly to the fathers of the households of those who were obedient to Him. There was no written law from God. The history of this “age” is to be found in the book of Genesis.

The second period is called the “Mosaic Age”. It covers some 1500 years, dating from Moses to the death of Christ. This was the time in which God’s people — the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham — were governed by the written law which God gave through Moses. The reason for choosing those people, and for giving the law itself, was to prepare the stage for the birth of the Son of God.

The third and final period of time is called the “Christian Age”, dating from the death of Christ and the beginning of His spiritual family, the church, as recorded in the second chapter of the book of Acts. This age will continue until His

return, when time will end and He will receive the church into that eternal world which He has gone to prepare (John 14:1-3).

Now it’s obvious that we didn’t live in the Patriarchal Age, or under the Law of Moses which ended with the death of Christ. Only one period of time, or age, remains — the Christian Age under the Law of Christ — so that is the age in which we live, and the law which we must keep.

Since we are not living in the Patriarchal Period or during the Mosaic Age, those laws do not apply to us! Isn’t that logical? Of course it is. So, we read the Old Testament for its example and history, and we learn much that is valuable to us. But God does not expect us to obey those laws

To this point, we have “rightly divided the word”. Now, since we live in the Christian Age, it is logical that we are expected to obey the law of Christ. We don’t have to worry about offering animal sacrifices or building an ark — those were commands to other people in other times! But our responsibility is to the Law of Christ *only!* Isn’t that simple?

A series of logical questions will help us to rightly divide the New Testament. **First**, who is the speaker? Is it God, Satan, some Bible character, or some other person? **Second**, to whom is he speaking? To the unbeliever, to Christians, to peo-

