

I. Introduction to Bible Study and Purpose

Today, as you know, we talked about getting back into our study of the Word of God itself. We have taken a little break here. Right after the first of the year, we had talked about where we want to go this next year. We talked about the people that God had brought into our church over the last year and a half, and really continues to bring in people who have a good ability to be taught the Word of God.

We are looking at this next year or so, really for the next couple of years, training people to teach people the Bible one on one. We are going to be starting here in the next month, a time where I can take those of you who have designated to me that you want to be part of that and begin to show you how to do that. We talked about opening up our counseling ministry so that we can begin to work with people and show them what the Scriptures say. These are a lot of exciting things that take time to put together, but that is what God has called us to do.

This study into the Bible, we started that simply because I wanted to not only teach you, but give all of the people in the years that would come down the line into our church a ready study reference. So if somebody says, "You know what, I really just want to learn the Bible, where do I start?" Well, what we have done is basically taken the Bible. We gave an introduction to the Old Testament, showed you how it fits into everything, and then we systematically started coming through every book one week at a time and given you what to look for when you study that particular book in your Bible.

I have dealt with people for years and years and years and taught them how to study the Bible. I think that one of the things that people talk to me most about when they begin to read the Bible, and reading the Bible is important, but if you do not know what you need to look for when you are reading it, then it is easy to lose interest in it. You get lost in the volumes of the Scriptures that really are very important, but if you do not know the keys to figuring it out, you can get bored real quick or get sidetracked or certainly come away with it not getting what you wanted.

I began years ago, when I began to work one-on-one with people in the Bible, to show them book by book what they will look for. I like to give them an overview of the Bible so that when they come to the Bible they can step back and say, "Okay, this is what the Bible is all about in a broad general sense. This is what I need to know before I enter into it." And then book by book, when you start to study the book of Genesis, you know what you have in the book of Genesis. You have an outline. It is broken down. You are shown the different aspects of how it all comes together. Every book of the Bible, book by book, we have done that through the Old Testament.

II. Key Concepts from the Old Testament Study

The first 39 books of the Bible, which is commonly called the Old Testament, we learned a number of things. Those things really help you put your Bible together. We began to define some things.

- First of all, we found out that there is a difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, probably one of the most fundamental keys of breaking down and understanding your Bible.
- We saw the beginning of God's plan. We looked at the Bible as a great picture book. We looked at the Bible as having a picture of something God wants us to see, which really covers from eternity to eternity. We broke the Bible down to begin to show you the beginning of God's plan.
- We saw that in the Bible there are two landmarks that are given. Those two landmarks are absolutely crucial for you following God through history, because the Bible is nothing more than what God is doing down through history. History is a very complicated thing. History without the Bible, history without understanding the relevance of God, can be very, very confusing. You have literally 6,000 years of man's history on this earth. In those 6,000 years you have nation after nation, king after king, dynasty after dynasty: the Egyptians, the early, the late, the middle Kingdom, all the pharaohs. Then you get into European history, literally the 14th, Jack Daniels II, and all of these things as you go through history. It is very confusing unless you understand that history is really basically simple. History is about two landmarks. When you get those landmarks in your surveying scope and you never lose sight of them, that is exactly how you can follow God through history.

In the Old Testament, the landmark is the nation of Israel. In the New Testament, the landmark is the church. When you understand those two landmarks and you find those landmarks and stay with them, all other history really becomes somewhat irrelevant. Not saying that it is not important, but it is only important to the fact of what God is doing with His two landmarks. Understanding the Bible is understanding what is important to God and understanding what God is doing. Not the CNN, not all the different aspects of life that go on around you, but focusing simply on the things that are important to God. When you focus on that and understand it, then you realize that God has two focus points in the Bible, which are called landmarks. You are told not to remove those landmarks in the book of Proverbs. One of them is the nation of Israel and the other one is the church.

We began to see how then in the Old Testament God begins the formulation of the nation of Israel. We even broke it down as we came through. We talked about Genesis to Judges, how God is calling out the nation of Israel and forms them up. We saw how that in Judges to 2 Chronicles, we saw the establishment of the nation of Israel. Then we saw from 2 Chronicles to Malachi, the rejection of God's Kingdom. Then a time period called the 400 silent years, which the Bible calls the times of the Gentiles, which brings us up to the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We talked about that when you study the Old Testament, that all the people, all the events, all the stories, all the circumstances, all the different stories that are recorded for you in the Bible always picture something. They are part of the picture book that God has given you. You will find that they will deal in an inspirational application. They will deal with the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. You will find in an inspirational application, they will deal and show us our own strengths and weaknesses. You will find this in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, where he talks about the things that happened to the people and the stories and the events in the Old Testament were for our examples, our own samples, and for our admonition that we might not make the same mistakes.

Of course, we realized that prophetically. In a prophetic concept, the Old Testament and all of the books hold for us the great prophecies about the Second Coming and the First Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it is an incredible study when you begin to look at it.

We learned a new word, well, many of you learned a new word, the word dispensation. We talked about how that a dispensation is nothing more than a period of time by which God deals different ways with different people. We also learned another great truth, and we talked about this last week. The Bible in its most practical form, and that is how I like to approach things. If God has given me any ability for my own self, it is to be able to see something complex, but learn how to understand it by seeing it in simplicity. I have learned a long time ago that if you want to learn how things work, you have got to see how they work. For me, it has always been an easy thing to look at something complicated and see how to make it simple so I can understand it. I am kind of a simple kind of guy, and I am not a very complicated person, and I look at things in their simplicity. So when I look at the Bible, I may understand the great depths of the Bible, but I understand them because first I understood the great simplistic things of the Bible. That is the key to learning the Bible: start with what is simple. As my wife has said many, many times, "Keep it simple, stupid," which is a very, and I am sure you husbands have heard that too, and that is the way it needs to be. When it comes to the Bible, keep it simple, stupid. That is really good. You break it down in its most simple form.

The Bible in its most simplistic, practical form is what we talked about last week. It is about choices. I told you last week that everything in life that seems complex is not really complex because life is simply, in a very simplistic way, about choices. We make choices in life and we make those choices, then we trade things for them. Life is a trade-off. Everything in life is a trade-off. When you decide to do something, good or bad, you trade something for it. We talked all about that, but in a historical aspiration of the Bible, in a practical sense, that is what the Bible is about.

You have Genesis, and then before Genesis, eternity past. You have Revelation, and then you have on the other side of that eternity future. From Genesis to Revelation, you have something called time. God carved out a little parentheses in eternity, and that parentheses run 7,000 years or so. That little parentheses called time is when man is on this earth and God acts out His plan from Genesis to Revelation.

In its most simplistic form, here is what you have: the Bible is about a book where God has a plan. God wants everybody on planet earth to be part of that plan. But God is not going to force you to be part of it. He is not going to come down and put a double hammer arm lock on you and make you get saved. You have your own free will because free volition is something that God has always gone with, that He wants men and women to choose to love Him, to choose to serve Him, not forced into that relationship.

So we see really from Genesis to Revelation, in its most simplistic form, the Bible is about choices. God gives every man, every woman, God gives every aspect of His creation. He gives the devil a choice in Ezekiel chapter 28 and Isaiah chapter 14. He gives the angels a choice in Revelation. He gives the cherubs a choice in Ezekiel chapter 1 and 10. He gives the seraphims a choice. He gives man before the law a choice and women. He gives man and women during the law a choice. He gives you and me a choice. He gives the church a choice. In fact, all down through the history of the Bible, in its most simplistic form, it is God has a plan. He has stopped that plan for a period of time before He picks up that plan and says, "Hey look, everybody involved. I am going somewhere and I am doing something great and I want you all to come with me." And man either says, "Yeah God, let us go," or "No thanks, I got a better deal."

Of course, life is about choice. The Bible in its most simplistic form is simply about man having a choice to accept God or reject God in these little parentheses called time that is just a flicker from eternity past to eternity future. In that, God just said, "All right, time out in eternity." That is really an oxymoron. There is no time in eternity. "Time out in eternity, and we are going to have a little space here where I am going to give man a book and tell him about my plan and invite him to come wherever he lives in that dispensation of time." That is really what the Bible is all about in its most simplistic form.

III. Transition to the New Testament and its Significance

Now we come to the New Testament, and that is where we are at today. All this material, if you are going to figure out life and especially the time that we are living in, I will tell you the truth. I have never seen a time in America and really around the world where it is so absolutely upside down with truth and right and wrong. I mean, I have never seen, and never in all of my years, and I know that the Bible says it is going to get progressively worse, and I understand that, and I am not complaining. I look forward to it because I know that that just gets me closer to the Lord, and I am ready to punch out here anytime God is. I know that all this departure from truth and all this screwed up concepts in the world today, it just goes back to the times that we live in that tell us that God is right on schedule with His plan.

But there has never been a time when people on planet earth do not know God. It is like I said Thursday night, they do not know God and they certainly do not know what God said and they certainly do not know what He thinks. We have had over a hundred years now in this country where this country has been without the word of God, and a progression through those hundred years where man now has totally taken a stand, saved man, religious man has totally taken a stand from the one absolute standard that was truth.

We talked about the Terri Schiavo thing last week, and I told you again Thursday night, it does not take anybody more than 20 minutes and go to four places in the Bible to understand what is going on. It is a very simple thing, but when you live in a world where the Bible tells us that good is now evil and evil is now good and truth is falling in the street, it is like the book of Judges where there is no king in Israel, no final authority, no place that you can go to get truth, and every man does what is right in his own eyes. So everybody makes it up and goes their own way, and that is what is wrong with America today.

When you come to the New Testament, you are going to find that when you learn the New Testament, you are getting into a circumstance that is an incredible book that finishes out the canon of Scripture. You are going to find that God builds in the New Testament on what He has already done in the Old Testament. Where the landmark in the Old Testament was the nation of Israel, we see the New Testament change to the church, the body of Christ. Where it was the literal visible kingdom of heaven given to Israel in the Old Testament, now we see a process by which it changes and it transitions into the body of Christ.

IV. The Parable of the Vineyard as a Bible Overview

We are right on schedule with our little chapter in Matthew, and I want you to come to Matthew chapter 21. I gave you this a number of weeks ago, and we also talked about it here Thursday night, either last week or not this last Thursday but a couple of Thursdays ago. We have talked about it many, many times, and I told you that in Matthew chapter 21, verse 33 through 40, you have a complete picture of your Bible. God does this a lot. There are a number of places you can go in the Bible that in eight or nine, ten verses God will give you a capsule overview of everything that is taking place within your Bible. Here it is in this parable here in verse 33, and I am going to read it and I will show you exactly where we are at on schedule and show you where we have come from. This parable spans Genesis to Revelation and everything in between.

Matthew 21:33-40

33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

Now, we have talked about this before, and I have showed you how that this parable here is a great truth on the whole Bible. I showed you how that in verse 33 you have the calling out and the establishment of the nation of Israel, really from Genesis up to 1 Samuel, because it is in 1 Samuel that God really ceases the great miracles that He does like He does in Exodus. He turns the ownership and leadership over to a tribe, Levi, and gives husbandmen, the kings of Israel, now charge of that vineyard, that vineyard being Israel. So we saw how that verse 33 brings us from Genesis really up to the book of 1 Samuel.

Then in verse 34, we find what is commonly called the time of the kings, 1 Samuel. This is where Israel was to bear fruit. You will find the Old Testament prophets making a reference to this many, many times. In fact, the story of the fig tree when Christ comes out at Bethany there the week before He is crucified and He sees the fig tree that has no fruit on it and He curses that fig tree. That is a picture of what we are talking about right here. Israel was to bear fruit under the husbandmen, under the leaders of Israel, David, Solomon, and all those men. That was the establishment of the kingdom, the literal visible kingdom in the vineyard, which is Jerusalem, and they did not do it.

So then verse 35, it says verse 44, that they send the servants, that would be the Old Testament prophets. In verses 35 and 36, you find them rejecting the prophets, killing them, stoning them, and all these are found in the Old Testament. Again, He sent other prophets, this will be the major and the minor prophets, or other servants, the major minor prophets, and they go to them likewise. Of course, this is where we find the rejection, and this is where between verse 36 and verse 37, you have the gap of those 400 silent years.

Then verse 37, here it comes: "But last of all he sent unto them his son." That is right where we are at now in the introduction of our New Testament. We are coming into the New Testament, which is we have seen the history of the nation of Israel typified by this parable. God bringing into the place, putting in them the land, giving them the kings, then rejecting that kingdom, rejecting the Word of God just like the church has done, and then being cast out 606 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib, 400 silent years, and now we come to the place where verse 37, "But last of all he sent them his son," the Lord Jesus Christ coming to the nation of Israel as the Messiah, saying, "They will reverence my son."

But when the husbandmen, the leaders of Israel, saw the son, that would be the scribes and the Pharisees, the husbandmen, they said among themselves, "This is the heir; come, and let us kill him," leaving no doubt in your mind now that they accidentally killed Jesus because they did not understand. They knew exactly who He was and they knew exactly why they wanted to kill Him. So there is no question about it. "And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." You go over to Jerusalem today, you would go on a little tour, they take you down to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Church of Holy Sepulchre was built back there around about 350 AD somewhere in there when Constantine's mother went down to Jerusalem, was shuffling through the garage sales, and lo and behold, she finds the original cross of Christ that He was crucified on, bought it for a cheap price. Constantine, the Roman emperor, was so

impressed with it that he sent all of his people over and built a church right on that spot because he said, "This is where Christ was crucified."

Now the Bible tells you that He is crucified outside the city. You find that in the book of Hebrews and you find it here. The Bible is very clear to tell you that when they caught Him, they cast Him out of the vineyard, Jerusalem. He is crucified on Gordon's Calvary, which is called Gordon's Calvary after a British general, General Gordon, who was a Bible believing Christian in the early 20th century, took the Word of God, a King James 1611 Authorized Version, and found the exact spot, Gordon's Calvary, the place of the skull where He was crucified according to the book of Hebrews and Matthew chapter 21. From that point, it has always bore his name, Gordon's Calvary, the right place with the right book with the right guy looking for it. But that is right where we are at right now. Then it talks about the fact that they reject Him in verse 39, and then it talks about the second coming of Christ in verse 40 when Christ comes back and deals with Israel because of their rejection.

V. Differences Between Old and New Testaments

There are a couple of things you need to understand about the Old Testament and the New Testament as we go into this. The difference between the Old Testament and New Testament is varied. There are many different things that set them apart, but I think one of the main things and the things that you have to understand, and the difference is the real difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the object of their obedience. In the Old Testament, the object of obedience varies according to what God is doing dispensationally. You will find that differently from when man is being dealt with before the law under his conscience. You will find that man doing different things when he is under the law of Moses, and then you will find us doing different things when we are under grace. Noah was told to build a boat, Abraham got his righteousness by believing what God said about the stars, and Abel gave the right sacrifice and it was accepted of the Lord. In both cases, the Old Testament and the New Testament, both grace and faith are in operation wherever you go in the Bible, no question about that. But the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the object of their obedience. In the Old Testament, that object of obedience varied. In the New Testament, it is fixed on the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross and His blood atonement, and there are no variations in it, and that is the major difference.

When you step back and look at it, something I have learned over the years, because man basically is against God. When you read Romans chapter 1, as we have done before, you begin to understand how much the Gentile mindset, when you read Romans chapter 2, that also the Jewish mindset, is against the things of God. But in Romans chapter 1, it shows you the mindset of the Gentiles, and we are all Gentiles unless you are Jewish. We are all Gentiles, and because we are Gentiles, we find our pedigree in Romans chapter 1, and the pedigree of the Gentile mindset is to get rid of God as quick as you can and then set yourself up as God.

Of course, when God wrote the Bible, He broke it into a New Testament and an Old Testament. Overall, God wrote the Bible not only to be the greatest book for you and me to go to heaven with, and I have told you this before, but God wrote the Bible as the greatest book in the world to

go to hell with. If you want a stumbling block in your life that will trip you up and mess you up and land you flat straight in hell, the Bible is the greatest book in the world to do that with. I have told you before, the Bible is the only book ever written that ever came to planet earth that is different than any other book that the world has ever seen. It is a supernatural book written by a supernatural God, and that book has enough power in it to save the lost souls of every man and woman that ever graced the place of this planet called planet earth. This book is set down by God, and this book is the answer that man is looking for. When man tries to go against it, God has taken the very book that will save you and it becomes the very stumbling block that will damn you.

That is the same way it was with Christ. The Bible says in the book of Matthew that Christ came down to be the chief cornerstone for the nation of Israel. In other words, when God built the nation of Israel, that foundation cornerstone was going to be Christ and what He taught. The Bible says they rejected Him, and the Bible says when they rejected the chief cornerstone, that same cornerstone became a rock of offense, a stumbling block that Israel stumbled after. That is why God wrote the New Testament, because when the Jews rejected Christ, He took Christ, who was the chief cornerstone, made Him a stumbling block, a rock of offense to the nation of Israel. Israel cannot get to Christ now because of the fact that they rejected Him. God wrote the New Testament all about Him, and when an Orthodox Jew, a real Orthodox Jew, hears the name of Jesus, he turns his head and spits because of the fact that he has rejected and killed the Son of God. The New Testament is that stumbling block because of what God has done with His Son Christ.

Then you have the Old Testament where the New Testament becomes a stumbling block for the nation of Israel. The Old Testament becomes a stumbling block for the religious Gentile or the Gentile in general. Because in the Old Testament, God takes the nation of Israel and He makes the nation of Israel and the Old Testament a theocratic military kingdom that a Gentile cannot get, because he thinks he is smarter than God and better than God and he thinks he has taken the place of the nation of Israel. Of course, I have said this before and I will say it again, when it comes to God, your best deal is just to get saved. Do not try to outsmart Him, do not try to outwit Him, because I have said it before, say it again, God has a monkey wrench in His toolbox that will fit any nut in this world. You will not get around God. His mind is sharper, keener, the most exhilarating mind you have ever seen, and you may think yourself to be something when it comes to figuring out and reasoning out and working out, but let me tell you something, you have met your match in the Lord Jesus Christ. You can try to get around this book all you want as man does, and God wrote the New Testament for a stumbling block to the Jew, and He wrote the Old Testament for a stumbling block to the nation of Israel.

VI. Themes and Historical Context of the New Testament

With all that in mind, when you begin to understand the New Testament, how it fits into your Bible, there are a couple of things you need to remember, and we are going to breeze through these because we have talked about it before.

➤ First of all, the theme in the Bible. The theme in the Bible is a kingdom of heaven. The establishment of a literal visible throne in Jerusalem that Christ is going to sit on in the millennium and be crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

➤ The next thing you need to realize is that all history is built around two times in your Bible: the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. It is so prevalent, even though the world hates Christ today, and even though 95% of the major religions in the world think that Christ is not coming back and have bought into amillennialism or postmillennialism, which basically says that He is not coming back. Even though the whole 95% of the religious world today has rejected Christ's return and rejected the Bible and have set their own religious systems up by which they operate, man cannot still not get away from the Word of God and the two most important factors in the Bible is the first coming and the second coming. There is not an unsaved rocket scientist, there is not an unsaved atheist, there is not an unsaved college professor, there is not an unsaved man or woman, an unsaved religionist who hates God, an agnostic or an atheist that defies God, who every time they look at their calendar they go back in history has to date history before His birth, first coming, or in the year of our Lord, the second coming. You cannot get around the two times in history that all the Bible in all history are around. The first coming of Christ which took place already and the second coming of Christ which is going to take place. Man can reject the Bible, laugh at God, and still it is 4000 BC (before Christ) or it is still 1950 AD, which means the Latin for "in the year of our Lord." In the year of our Lord, what does that mean? It means it is counting down from the first coming to the second coming. Master of the obvious, that is the way it is. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure it out. You listen to a little talk radio, pick up a few things here and watch the History Channel at Easter time and you get it down.

➤ You will find that the concept of the church, which we are about to study in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament as it develops, it is really a mystery of God. In fact, it is one of the seven mysteries in the Bible that does not get revealed until Paul gets saved in Acts chapter 9, and then he begins to work from there. Yet, it is some 13 years after Paul's salvation when all this thing begins to transpire and take place. What you begin to see here is that God's unconditional promises of Israel, mixing with the mystery of the church and how God works this thing out. The church is never referred to in the Old Testament. It is never referred to directly in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because it is a mystery. You find it in

type and you find it in veiled references that we only know the reference now because we have the complete Bible. But nobody in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John was walking around saying, "Okay, here is the way it is going to work. I just looked it up here in all the other books and this is..." No, no, they are going by the time that they work through as God gives them the light and helps them understand what God is doing.

VII. Technical Placement of Gospels and Rightly Dividing Scripture

Technically speaking, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are in the Old Testament. I know you open up your Bible that says, "Here it is, the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." Yes, I understand that. From that aspect, when it was written, that is true. But you have got to look at what the Bible says. The Bible says in the book of Hebrews that the Testament does not come into effect until the death of the testator. So technically speaking, from Hebrews chapter 9:16, and also in Matthew chapter 21, where we are looking at it here, technically speaking, the New Testament does not come into effect until the death of Christ. That is an incredible thing that you have got to remember. We are going to look at that a little bit later as we begin to kind of set the stage for, and this week we are just kind of giving you the overview where you can grab it, and next week we are going to come start drilling through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and giving you the outline.

I do not know how you study, but when I buy a book, I do two things. Before I ever read the book, I always read the last chapter because I want to know what the bottom line is. If I get a book and I read the bottom line and the guy does not get killed in, I am not going to read it. If it all works out good, I do not care. I only want to see how it works out if it is bad. Then I read the preface or sometimes called the introduction because you will find more overlay and understanding because what the guy will do is give you his perspective. That is so important for any book. When I am reading a book on a biography, and I love biographies, and I have read over the years the great biographies of the great men, leaders, military, spiritual, politicians, whatever, the first thing I do is I read the preface. I find out what this guy's perspective is. Then I will read the last chapter, see if they got that right. Then I will begin to read the book. But when I read it, I now have this guy's perspective because perspective is important. You have got to have the perspective by which you are coming at something for you get the right perspective or make your own perspective. So what I am doing today is what I did before we started the Old Testament. I am giving you the perspective. I am helping you to see how this thing all flows together. That is why it is so important for you to see that.

In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and also the book of Acts, they are very important books because we know now that they are still in the Old Testament. When the disciples are sent out in Matthew chapter 10 to preach the kingdom, kingdom of heaven, they are specifically told not to go to the Gentiles. The church has not been in effect in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is certainly not up to the death and the resurrection anyhow. But when He sends those 10 out or

those 12 out in chapter 10, He tells them specifically, "Do not go to the Gentiles." We are not starting the church. We are bringing the kingdom to Israel because the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ is when God brings that kingdom to the nation of Israel.

So we see in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John is centered around the first coming. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the early part of the book of Acts, you are going to find that the Jew gets three chances to get that kingdom.

➤ The first chance he gets is with John the Baptist who comes preaching the kingdom of heaven and telling Israel to repent. Israel, not the Gentiles. I know you have a group of people out there called Baptist writers who think that the first Baptist church started with John the Baptist, but your bats in your belfries have rabies. It does not work that way. John the Baptist was coming to Israel, and that is the first chance that they have.

➤ The second chance they have is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and we know what they did with Him. They killed Him, crucified Him.

➤ The last chance they get is in Acts chapter 7 under the preaching of Stephen. When Stephen preaches at the end of Acts chapter 7, the whole thing changes, and we will come through this when we get to these books point by point. We do not have time to do it today.

You begin to see that in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the early part of the book of Acts up to Acts chapter 7, God is in a fluctuating period where He is giving Israel. The mystery of the church is still a mystery. He has not revealed it yet. He does not reveal it until after Acts chapter 7 once they make their final rejection. Once they make their final rejection, then He brings in the church age. He gets a man saved, Paul. In fact, it is so clear they reject in Acts chapter 7. In Acts chapter 8, half Jews, half Gentiles get saved, Samaritans. In Acts chapter 9, the apostle to the Gentiles gets saved, Paul. The first missionary trip starts, church at Antioch, and off we go. Anybody could see that. Well, not anybody, but you ought to be able to see that.

What happens is that in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, God sends His Son, just like we saw in Matthew chapter 21. He sends His Son and says, "Certainly they will reverence my son," the chief cornerstone. They reject Him. He turns into a rock of offense. He becomes a stumbling block that Israel stumbles at. In time, at the second coming of Christ, He turns into the smiting stone of Daniel chapter 2, which smashes the toes of the Antichrist, the 10 kingdom of iron and clay. He is the smiting stone, all the way through it, goes through your Bible.

Now, this brings up a dangerous thing in Matthew, Acts, and Hebrews because these are all transitional books. I want to say this because you need to learn this, and this is all stuff you need to know before you go in. Here is how it works: Matthew to Acts chapter 7 is a transition into the church age. Paul's writings are doctrines to the church after we are in the church age, and

Hebrews to Revelation is a transitional book from the church age into the tribulation period. You have got to understand that.

There are two rules when it comes to rightly dividing the word of truth. Well, there are a bunch of rules, but I am going to give you two of them. Two rules. The Bible says in 2 Timothy chapter 2:15 that we are to rightly divide, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." You know what? You are either going to rightly divide it or you are going to wrongly divide it. Here is how it works: from Matthew to Acts 7, it is a transition into the church. Paul writes, he writes the doctrine to the church. Then from Hebrews to Revelation, it is a picture of the church transitioning out, moving into the tribulation period.

When you come to the Bible, you have got to remember this: all the Bible is written for you. Everything in that Bible from Genesis to Revelation is written for you, but it is not all written to you. You have got to determine who He is speaking to. This is how people get into heresy. This is why there are so many heresies in the body of Christ. This is why there are so many religious heresies in the world. One of the things you have got to remember is you never build a New Testament church doctrine on any book other than Paul's writings. His books constitute for you and for me the church. He is the apostle to the Gentiles. He is not one of the twelve. He is a 13th apostle. He will never sit on a 12th throne judging Israel. He is an apostle that is from the rest, who is a Jew. He says himself, "a Jew born out of due season," who represents the church. It is Peter who stays in Jerusalem with the Jews. It is Paul that preaches the Gospel of the grace of God. It was such a message to him that he calls it his Gospel because it was something God gave to him only, and then it goes from him. That is why the bedrock of Bible doctrine.

I am not saying you cannot preach great truth for the body of Christ out of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, or Acts, or Hebrews. I am not saying that. But what I am saying is whatever you lift out, and I am going to show you here some examples in just a second, whatever you lift out and preach, it better line up with something that Paul wrote in the Pauline epistles, which is doctrine for the church. I am not saying there is not truth that you cannot get, but sometimes the truth that you get is going somewhere else other than directly at you.

This is why today, as we stand here, there are people who believe you have got to be baptized to go to heaven. Why? Because they take it out of Acts. Do they get it out of Paul's writings? Nowhere to be found. Where do they get it? Acts. Where do they get it? Matthew. Where do they get it? Mark. Where do they get it? Luke. Where do they get it? John. Do they find that in anything Paul wrote to the church? Not on your life. That is why people think, "You know what, you can lose your salvation." Where do they get it? Do they get it from anything Paul wrote? Never happened in a million years. Well, where do you get it? Hebrews. Where do you get it? Matthew. Where do you get it? Acts. Where do they get it? Mark. You never get it from anything that Paul wrote. You have to lift it out of context, bring it over, and lay it down as a New Testament teaching where it is not supported in the books given to the New Testament church. That is just how it happens.

I will show you some examples. If you go into your average Christian bookstore today, you will find that there are hundreds and hundreds of books on the issue of remarriage, divorce, and all the things that go along with it. You will find that when you buy those books, that you will find that 99% of those books will take you to Matthew chapter 19, take you to Deuteronomy chapter 24, and they will build the whole doctrine for divorce, how God deals with it, remarriage, or marriage in general, or whatever. They will all go back to those books and they will lay it out from there. The truth of the matter is the writing and the teaching for the New Testament church is not in Matthew chapter 19 on divorce and remarriage, nor is it in Deuteronomy chapter 24. It is in Romans chapter 7. In Romans chapter 7, he takes the whole chapter and verse by verse, lays out at least 35 points on the New Testament doctrine for how to deal with divorce, problems in the marriage, what constitutes marriage, and lays it out point by point.

You know what? There are things in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 that he gives to the church he did not give to the Old Testament Jew under the Old Testament. I have heard there are a couple of places in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 where Paul makes a statement like this, "To the rest speak I and not the Lord," or "The Lord command to this and not me." There is one place in particular he says, "To the rest speak I not the Lord." I have heard pastors say and teach that that is where Paul was out of fellowship with God and he was speaking out of turn and he had no business speaking outside of what the Lord was telling him. That is the most absolute ludicrous concept that you can get. You know what he is saying? When he is saying, "The rest speak I not the Lord," he is saying, "Hey, I am giving you revelation through the body of Christ to the church that God did not give the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 24 and Matthew chapter 19." Because it is not the same. It does not work the same. It does not deal the same. There is a difference between the two.

I will show you another one. Come over to Matthew chapter 25. I will show you another one. Here is one. You want to lose your salvation? Here is where you go. You cannot go to anything that Paul wrote. You could not find one place where Paul writes anything that would even suggest you can lose it. But if you are just bent on losing it, let me help you this morning. I have never understood that. I have had people that got so mad and so angry and so upset because they just wanted to believe you could lose it. Let me tell you something. If I thought you could really lose it, I would not be bragging about it. Because you know what? The bottom line is if you can lose it, friend, you are going to lose it. Who do you think you are? Why the greatest, wisest, holiest man that ever walked the face of this planet, the devil found a weak spot and got them. If it is possible for you to lose it, you are going to hold on to it. You are going to hold on to it. You are going to hold on to it. You are going to hold on to it, and then you are going to have a heart attack and you are going to be laying in bed holding on in the hospital, holding on, holding on, holding on, "I am going to die in 15 seconds. Oh no, 20 seconds, 19, 18, I got it." About five seconds from death, the devil is going to bring a dirty thought through your mind, you are going to lose it. You know why? I cannot keep it. You cannot keep it. That is why He came down and died on the cross. He has to keep it for me. I cannot even find, I lose my car keys five times a day. What am I going to do with my salvation? But if you are just bent on losing it, let me help you today.

Matthew 25:1-8

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

Everybody teaches that thing as, "Now there it is, there are some Christians who lost their oil, type of the Holy Spirit of God. Christ came, they were not ready, and they got left behind. See, see, see, I told you, told you, told you, you can lose your salvation." Not written to the church, not written to the church, not written to the church concept. Verse 1: "kingdom of heaven." I do not have time to go through and show you the difference between virgins and virgins, but there is a big difference. One little "s" on the end of a word makes a whole difference in the Bible. But this is a different book than reading any other book. This has nothing to do with the church. When this is written, the church was not even in effect yet. This has to do with the nation of Israel. God is dealing with the Jew, and this parable, the 11th of 12, 12 being 12 tribes, 12 parables, one for each tribe, it has to do with the nation of Israel, nothing to do with the church. But when you lift it out and forsake the writings of Paul and put it into your life and say, "This is church doctrine," then you start teaching you can lose your salvation.

I will show you another one. Come over to the same chapter, look at verse 14.

Matthew 25:14-29

14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

We use this, how many times have I heard this? We use this as, "Here it is." Now, I am not saying you cannot, but you have got to be, this is my point, you have got to be careful. There are some similarities between this story and the New Testament church. You know why? Because God has given you talents and abilities and you need to make good investments with them, and if you do not make good investments, when God comes back at the Judgment Seat of Christ, you are going to give an account for being a bad steward. There is some similarity, but if you take this and try to make a doctrine for the church and you say, "Well, these are Christians and some of these Christians did real good, kind of good, and one of them did not do nothing," and it comes down in verse 29 and says, "See, here is what it says: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Now, if so far it fits into the church, watch: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Cannot go to the church now. It is talking about something else. That is my point. You have got to be careful. Matthew, Acts, Hebrews are landmines. You have got to watch where you walk. You are only safe 100% of the time knowing church doctrine to the church when you are in the books written by the apostle of the church.

I am not saying that there are not things in those other books that line up. A lot of it does not, and you have got to know where. The rule of thumb is you always go back and you always base what you are reading before you make it a doctrine on what the doctrine to the church by the apostle

of the church in his writing says. You have got to understand that this thing lays itself out all the way through. You are going to find that in the four Gospels, as seen in the book of Acts, all events, people, stories, and situations in the four Gospels, they picture Israel's spiritual condition. Now, I am not going to stand here and tell you that there are not parallels between Israel's condition and our condition, that you cannot go back and look at the Old Testament nation of Israel and make the parallels the way we are today. Certainly you can, but it may or may not fit entirely into the church, and you have always got to go with the rule of studying the Bible of what is the context.

There are three groups of people addressed in your Bible: the Jew, Gentiles, and the church. Your Bible will be directed directly to one of those three groups. That does not mean you cannot learn a lot of things from what it is written to the other groups, but you cannot take that and apply it to yourself. You have to understand that the Bible is an overall picture of God. God is dealing with people, all things for our admonition and learning, but not everything is written directly to you. If that was true, you could not have a bathroom in your house. If that was true, you could have no pictures on the wall. If it was true, you guys would have to wear your hair a certain way. Everything is not written to you. It is all written for you, but not all directly to you, and you have got to be able to rightly divide that.

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the word "Gospel" means good news. You will find that the Gospels define for you in 1 Corinthians chapter 15:1-5, and you will find that the Gospels, they show you Christ's first coming to Israel after the 400 years of silence to fulfill all the prophecies that were foretold, some of them 600, 1000 years before the death of the birth of Christ and His death. It shows you one of the two most important times which all history is built around: the first coming and the second coming. It brings you from one landmark, the Old Testament nation of Israel, into the new landmark, the body of Christ. It transitions through these books depending on what Israel does with the three chances that they get, and you have got to understand when you look at the Bible, you have got to see it in this light. It records Israel's spiritual condition, how they rejected it, like Matthew chapter 21 gives you the inside look of the Jewish king and how the scribes and the Pharisees really saw Him, and how God after the rejection, He begins to turn His attention to the nation of Israel and slowly through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the early part of the book of Acts, you find the transition from the nation of Israel to the body of Christ. You find the from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the kingdom of heaven to the kingdom of God. These four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, will set up for you the next 2,000 years of history.

When you are reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, nobody knows about the church. We know about it because we have got the complete Bible 2,000 years after it was all done. Nobody knew about it back then. God had not revealed the church yet. God is still dealing with the nation of Israel, and you have to understand that fact. That is why you cannot base, I will say it again, your Bible teaching and your Bible doctrine for the church out of those books. Some things match up, some things do not. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," does it match? It certainly does. It matches up with other things that Paul says. Matthew chapter 25 does not. Other places do not. Some of the most screwed up heresy for the 20th century, 21st century

church is taught out of the book of Hebrews today because somebody with a PhD and who has got all kinds of scholarly credentials after him simply cannot read the book in the title and it says "Hebrews," not "the church." You get some of the screwiest stuff out of the book of James where anybody could read the first verse because the first verse usually tells you what you are dealing with that says there are 12 tribes scattered abroad, not to the church. Now, I am not saying you cannot get teaching out of it, obviously you can, but you have got to see who He is talking to, and if you do not, you will wind up wrongly dividing it. If you do, you will rightly divide it.

VIII. The "Synoptic Problem" and the Fourfold Portrayal of Christ

You are going to find that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is a bridge. It is a bridge for His Son. It begins to make the transition. When He writes Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they are all written many years after the fact. John writes the Gospel of John in 90 AD, many, many years after Christ, 60 some years after Christ has died, he writes John. Matthew is written 85 AD somewhere in there. They are all written very on past the time.

The four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that we are about to get into next week, are greatly criticized by Christian scholars. We have what we call the synoptic problem. The synoptic problem is a unique problem because, believe it or not, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John do not all add up and line up right. You will read in Matthew one story and it will tell you there was one guy. You will read in Luke the same story, he will tell you there were two guys. You will read in John over there that when Christ comes out of the tomb that there are two angels and the Lord. Then you will go over to Matthew and you will just read about the angel and no Lord and no other angel. So it has led the guys to believe over the years that you cannot really trust the Gospels. Synoptic means they ought to read together, and they do not.

Here is what they teach us, and this is valuable for you to know because you can go home, the first thing you want to do is rip Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John out of your Bible because they are no good anymore. This is what they tell you. They tell you that when the men wrote them, they wrote them so many years later that their minds had fogged, they had forgotten the details, and this is why the Scriptures as we have it are really untrustworthy. You really cannot trust Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are written so far removed from the facts that the men that wrote it either did not witness the facts or they were told second and third hand. That is why you have the great variances between the books. The guy that wrote Matthew and said there was only one guy, and the guy that wrote the other book that says there were two guys, the one guy that wrote the one guy, he obviously did not have all the information. Therefore, you have got to be careful and you really cannot say, "Well, this guy wrote two, this guy wrote one, so this is better," because there are places in here where he does not get it right with the other guy. What you come down with, you know what? You cannot trust any of them. "Just trust me, I will tell you what the real Greek and the Hebrew means. You see, I will lay it out for you so you will show, you will never get to heaven. I will figure it out for you. Just do not trust your Bible, trust me. Let me tell you what it means because you get this, there is

no book on this earth that is tainted by man and you cannot trust it. So you know what? I will show you what it says." No, no, that is not the way it works.

You see, God has a plan, and God has a plan that Gentiles cannot get. They are not going to match up. You know why? Because when He wrote Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, He portrayed the Lord Jesus Christ four different ways.

- When He wrote Matthew, He portrays Christ as the King of the Jews. When you go into Matthew chapter 1, you find a genealogy line. You know what gene line it is? It is a line going back to the King.
- When He wrote Mark, He portrayed Christ as a Servant of the Jews. You will not find the genealogy in Mark. You know why? Because a servant does not have a genealogy. He is a bondsman.
- When He wrote Luke, He portrayed Luke. Luke was a medical doctor. He wrote the book of Acts. What better man to write about the earthly man Christ than a physician? When Luke writes, he portrays Him as the Son of Man. When you find a genealogy in the early part of Luke, it does not go back through the kingly line, it goes back through Mary, through the human line.
- When you find John, John does not portray Him as the King of the Jews. He does not portray Him as a Servant of God. He does not portray Him as the Son of Man. He portrays Him as the Son of God. So when John chapter 1, his genealogy going back goes all the way back to the beginning: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Right on down the line.

One of them portrays Him as the King, another one a Servant, another the Son of Man, the last one the Son of God. There is no synoptic problem, no synoptic problem at all. The problem simply is that you want to reject the Word of God and you do not want to let the Bible be what the Bible is. God wrote it, and when He wrote it, He gave you four accounts of the first coming of Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Every one of them puts the emphasis on something different about Christ. You know what the key word of the Bible is? What? Consistency. Let us try it again. Key word in the Bible is what? Consistency. Oh, now I feel better. I know you are all in mourning this morning because of the Pope and grieving over that. I have got to understand why your mind is transfixed somewhere else.

The Bible is consistent. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give you four accounts of the first coming of Christ. So you know what He did in the book of Revelation? He gives you four accounts of the second coming of Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have been tracing four

different ways. In the book of Revelation, from chapter 6 right on through chapter 19, they have been tracing four different ways. That is the Bible. This material is absolutely necessary for us to put together what God is doing.

If you want to find out who God is, you have got to find out what He said. I am just telling you, you will never, this country today and all that tomfoolery that is going around in Christianity and everything else in this world that has absolutely nothing to do with God, it is simply because people today do not know God. If you are going to know God, there is only one way you are going to get to know Him. You have to find out, if you want to find out who He is, you have got to find out what He said. Once you find out what He said, if you want to have the victorious Christian life, then you have got to find out what He thinks about everything in life. When you find out who God is, you find out what He says, and you find out what He thinks, you know what? Nothing in this life is going to get over you. You are going to understand it. You are going to be an overcomer in that sense, and you are going to, and that is why this material is absolutely necessary for us to put together what God is doing from Genesis to Revelation and learn how to rightly divide the word of truth. When we came through the Old Testament, I showed you how to rightly divide it. Now we are going to build on what we have already seen and already done.

IX. The Bible as a Book of Choices and Trade-offs

The New Testament church now is the landmark. In the Old Testament, it was the nation of Israel. But there is something different here, and we have got to see this as we close. There is something different here. I have got 39 books that give me the whole thing about the nation of Israel. I do not have to speculate and wonder about a thing. I can trace that landmark from Genesis 1 to Genesis 15 to Exodus 1 to Joshua, the Judges, right on through 2 Chronicles chapter 36 and then beyond. No problem.

Now the second landmark, the church. But here is the kicker: after 90 AD, there is no more written about the Bible. How do you trace that landmark? I mean, the Old Testament is easy, you have a book that lays it out step by step. Once you get to the end of the New Testament and there are no more books being written, how do you go the next 2,000 years following that landmark? I will tell you how: God put everything you need in that book right there. That is why you have got to learn it, because when you learn it, you will find out what God is thinking, where He is going, and what He is doing, and what He thinks about it. We have everything we need to trace God for the next 2,000 years because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John set the stage, building upon what already has been done, but it sets the stage for where God is going and what God is doing.

I told you the most simplistic form of the Bible is it is nothing but choices. When you start the New Testament, you start to see God turn His attention to the church, and now He is giving the church a choice. He is giving men and women under the New Testament grace period a choice. He gave it to them in the Old Testament. He gave it all down through the Bible. I said it before, He gave the devil, He gave the cherubims, He gave everybody. Everybody gets to make the choice. You know what? You can make the Bible as complicated as you want. You can make it as theological as you want. You can spend the rest of your life going through the Greek and Hebrew

and finding all the nuggets. But you know what? The Bible in its most simplistic form is simply this: God loves you, God died for you, and He has got a plan, and He is going to, He has postponed that plan for a short period of time, and He is simply like He has pulled up the bus at the curb of the road and said, "Hey everybody, want to go with me? Get on the bus." But you have a choice. That is all life is.

I know we make choices about everything in life, but the ultimate choice is what you are going to do with God in your own life. That is the only choice. That is the only choice there ever is, and that choice will determine what good choices or bad choices you make the rest of your life. Somebody said, "Well, that guy, that gal, that guy has really made some bad choices in life." You know what? All they have is making a lot of bad choices after they made the first bad choice. The first bad choice was not trusting Christ as their own personal Savior. That was the first bad choice people make, and then the choices after that are just all relevant to the choice that you made.

When a man dies and goes to hell, somebody said, "Wow, that was a terrible thing." No, you know what? He made a choice. He looked at God, he looked at the Bible, he looked at life, and he said, "You know what? I am going to choose this." When he chose that, he traded this for this. That is all that it is. Life is choices and life is trade-offs. When you come down through life and a man gets to the end of his life, he can look back and he can basically look at his life or her life and say, "You know what? I am right where I am at today with God based on the choices I made and the trade-offs that I put into it." That is all that it is. When an unsaved man dies and goes to hell, it is not because he did not hear the Gospel. It is not because he did not have an opportunity. The Bible says He is the true life, the light of every man coming into the world. It is when he was touched with that light, he made a choice, and that choice then he traded this for that.

There are people in the world that have traded religion for Christ. There are people that have traded money and riches for Christ. There are people that have traded family and professionalism and fame for Christ. All those things are trade-offs, and they all come down to the ultimate choice. So when all the Bible is, and it is a lot, and how it lays itself out, and it is an incredible book, in its most basic, simplistic, practical form, it is about men and women in the scope from eternity past before God picks it up in eternity future, making a little parentheses called time, and in that parentheses saying, "Hey, make a choice." The Holy Spirit of God wants men and women to come to fulfill that plan all down through the Bible. In the book of Ephesians, it talks about the household of God. All those dispensations are nothing more than God filling up the different households. That is all it is. Before the law, that is one household. During the law, that is another household. Every one of them, every one of them, make up a different household of the family of God that you find in the book of Ephesians, and you will find it laid out all the way through the Bible. When it comes down to the final analysis, God is giving men and women the choice, the choice, the chance to choose to be with Him. So that is what the New Testament is all going to be all about. Next week we are going to focus right on to the book of Matthew, and we are going to start through book by book, and you are going to see how this thing really begins to pull together.