



## *A Puzzling Silence*

Over the past couple of weeks we have been talking about how to understand the Bible and made a comparison to a puzzle. One of the interesting things about the Bible is a gradual change that occurs from the beginning of the scriptural record to the end. In the past fifteen years or so there have been several books that have been written specifically about this and the writers have indeed been insightful in their observation that there is a change that occurs. Some have called this a phenomenon and speculate on its apparent meaning. *The Disappearance of God* by Richard Elliott Friedman, published in 1995 was met with interesting reviews and some applauded the work as a monumental uncovering of something that had not been observed. For anyone who has read the Bible we understand that God does not retreat to some distant realm, nor does He truly disappear. In the beginning of the scriptural narrative we find that the “*voice of God*” was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the evening as Adam and Eve hid themselves having eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Gen 3.8**). Students of the Bible realize this is not new information but for some it can make understanding the Bible difficult for those unfamiliar with it. We can identify three distinct periods in the Bible that mark how God dealt with mankind. In the beginning, until the time of Moses, God spoke directly to the heads of households. This includes Adam, Cain, Abel, Abraham and Moses himself who marks the transition to a different way of delivering God’s message to man. This first period is referred to as the Patriarchal Age. As God revealed himself to Moses and instructed him to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, we find the beginning of a period during which God worked through the lawgiver Moses and later through prophets who revealed God’s will. This second period is identified by a distinct law, the Law of Moses, which governed the people of the Lord until Christ came into the world. This period also marks the recording of Gods instructions in a written form. The **Mosaic Age** is therefore a combination

of primarily a written law but also the ability to consult with God through the priests and prophets who were led by His spirit. When Christ came into the world it was to fulfill this law (**Matt 5.17**). The establishment of the Lord’s church on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**) marks the beginning of the preaching of salvation and remission of sins through the sacrifice of Christ. We refer to this as the **Christian Age**. The word dispensation is also used to refer to each of these periods. The Christian Age, or Dispensation, is marked by the revelation of God’s will to inspired writers who recorded the Gospel for all time. John refers to this age as the “last days” (**1 John 2.18**). God’s voice indeed fades, replaced by the written word which we now have. Paul refers to the preservation of God’s will through “*earthen vessels*” (**2 Cor 4.7**), emphasizing the need for faithfulness to that which was revealed. During this latter period, God has not gone away, nor is the image of God a representation of the evolution of man’s thinking in favor of that which is more rational. We find that the sacrifice of Christ covers all sins, even those under the previous periods (**Heb 9.15**) bringing the faithful of all time under the saving grace of Jesus as Lord. One might question why this is since the Law of Moses was delivered to the descendants of Abraham. One of the more subtle things about the Bible is that those outside the nation of Israel were still under the patriarchal law and Paul refers to the fact that God “*winked*” at the ignorance of man until all had been revealed (**Acts 17.30**). Since Christ has come into the world, God commands all men to repent (**Acts 17.30**). The establishment of the nation was to bring Christ into the world and sets the stage, so to speak, for the final word that has been promised. One of the things that writers point to is a “plot” to the Bible. The “plot” revolves around the central theme of the Bible which we will discuss next week in “**Connecting The Pieces**”.

TLC