

or thank Him. In verse 23 they changed the glory of God into a corruptible image. In verse 24 God let them go their own way. And in verse 25 they changed the truth into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature instead of the Creator.

With regard to present tense, in verse 18 God's wrath is being revealed, and sinful human beings are suppressing the truth. In verse 19 that which is known of God is manifest among them. In verse 20 God's invisible power and divinity are being perceived and understood.

How can both the past tenses and the present tenses refer to the same class of human beings?

Four basic interpretations of this passage have been proposed:

(a) One interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the people who lived just prior to the great Flood of Noah's time; and that these people turned away from the true knowledge of God, lost it, became very wicked and corrupt, and were given over to destruction.

This view certainly accounts for the past tenses in the passage. However, since all of the people who lived prior to the Flood (except Noah and seven relatives) were destroyed in the Flood, none of the present tenses in the passage can apply to them. And yet these same human beings are said to be presently perceiving the truth and understanding it, and presently suppressing it. Thus this view does not include all of the data of this passage; and on this ground must be discarded.

(b) A second interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the transition from the age of childhood innocency, when all human beings know God, to the age of moral accountability, when human beings turn away from the true knowledge of God, lose it, become sinners, and are given over to their depravity and corruption.

This view has the distinct advantage of including both past and present tenses in the life of each individual human being. However, it introduces a concept (the age of accountability) for which it is difficult to find scriptural support.

Although there is a relative sense in which one may speak of childhood innocency (as in Matthew 18:2-4, where Jesus says "unless you are converted and become like children"; or in I Corinthians 14:20, where Paul says "in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature"), yet one must search the Scriptures diligently to find support for the concept that human beings first become sinful and depraved when they reach a certain point in their childhood development.