

TLCBiblical.com Video Series

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1. Introduction

One of the obstacles many experience when trying to understand the Bible is making sense out of the different ways in which God dealt with humans over time. This video will introduce **The Ages Of God** as we prepare to examine three distinct periods in the development of God's plan to save mankind.

2. The Ages Of God

The scriptures reveal many things, some of which are stated directly while others are expressed indirectly. As we study the word we need to pay close attention to how things are done, under what circumstances they occur and the overall context to derive their significance and meaning. Patterns emerge in the writings that are critical to developing our understanding of how God's plan takes form and is later fully revealed.

The changes that occur in the Bible may be confusing to some as there's no obvious explanation that's stated. In order to understand these changes we need to develop a sense of the narrative and the history that unfolds. In the last video we reviewed the historical narrative and noted that the Bible traces a spiritual path through the scriptures and is therefore not a comprehensive history of the ancient world. First let's review the characteristics of the biblical story. These will provide a foundation for understanding various changes that appear in the text.

Some have observed that one of the most notable changes in the Bible is the presence of God's voice. In the beginning the Lord communicated his message to mankind verbally. Over time a transition takes place in which God no longer openly speaks to heads of households. During this time messengers receive directives from God that are relayed to those for whom the message is intended. Later we find that God's word exists in a purely written form and direct communication through visions, dreams, angels, the Holy Spirit and other means slowly fade leaving us with the written word in the form we have now.

We'll cover these changes in more depth as the study progresses but we need to understand that these are in line with God's plan over time. Psychologists and others who have observed these transitions sometimes interpret this as the evolution of human thought. According to them the complexity of the messages and the fading voice of God don't represent the unfolding of a divine plan but see these as the product of mankind's intellectual development. This interpretation views the Bible as representing the preservation of cultural traditions and stories that were passed down first by word of mouth and were eventually recorded in written form. Adopting this way of thinking the scriptures are seen as mythological accounts in some cases or as the expression of the culture of origin's moral beliefs. When we compare the Bible to other ancient documents, including the mythic traditions of the ancient world, we find that the scriptures possess a character unlike these other writings. We can also note other differences that set the Bible apart from these as well.

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Although some of the earliest accounts appear to have a mythical quality, such as a serpent speaking to a woman in a garden paradise, or the world being inundated by a global flood, the nature of these stories have a unique character that fits the development of the overall narrative. Later as the story develops and prophets warn God's people of impending destruction we can see that the messages delivered have a distinct purpose. In each of these instances God's commands are being violated and consequences for those violations are the result. We can establish a cause and effect relationship in these events that once more fit seamlessly with the unfolding of a greater plan that has a design and purpose.

Another difference we can observe is the nature of God contrasted with the character of man. God, as revealed in the Bible, doesn't have human qualities and although the Lord is sometimes pleased with those who follow him, or angered by their actions He also displays patience, concern and a willingness to bless those who turn from their evil ways. God establishes an order to the universe and life in the beginning and then acts within the confines of His laws. This is confusing to some who reject the Bible when they read of the Lord's instructions to destroy others or take what they view as negative action against those who fail to follow His directives. Some nations are subjected to God's judgment for reasons that are interpreted as different from the way of life the Lord's followers have been given. As we explore the ways in which God revealed his commands we'll discuss the reasons for this in a spiritual context. The end result is that God isn't a reflection of human emotion and therefore not the product of human imagination. We'll also see that the conflicts between God's people and nations around them is more than a clash of cultures. This is evidenced by the fact that the Lord's people eventually rejected His laws and yet the message prevailed and God's will was accomplished in spite of the actions of humanity.

A significant contrast can also be drawn between what we read about God and the pagan deities of other cultures. From the opening chapters of the Bible the Lord demonstrates goodness and power as well as judgment. Within the events recorded we continually find that the power of God is real while idols are exposed for what they are, lifeless relics of stone, wood, plants or even animals. God prevents His people from creating any object or likeness to represent Him. Moses reminds the children of Israel that even though they were in the presence of God at Sinai, they never saw anything that could later be used to create an idol or image. The prophets also note this as they draw comparisons to idols and often refer to Jehovah as the living God. The fact that God is real, has power and is able to bring about His will is responsible for the presence of the written word today. When I discussed versions of the Bible I noted that the available documents from which the scriptures are translated outnumber any other ancient writing. The volume alone speaks for the providence of God in making sure that His word not only survived but is widely available today. Ancient religions based on the worship of idols have faded and are truly relics of a past that didn't survive the test of time.

While the voice of God fades in a verbal sense its replaced by the written word and takes on a more permanent nature. The God of the Old Testament is not just a vengeful being who is replaced by the loving Christ of the New Testament, but is the giver of every good and perfect gift who has

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revealed himself to us. Reviewing the ways in which God brought these things about will demonstrate wisdom, planning and patience. Mysteries that are unexplained will become understandable as the overall execution of the Lord's will is brought to its fulfillment and explained in the text. We'll find that the Father and Son share a common nature and have worked through the ages to bring about the eternal plan that will save those who listen and follow His commands.

The next three videos cover distinct periods of time that are characterized by the way in which God dealt with mankind. The first of these is the **Patriarchal** age or dispensation in which God spoke directly to the heads of households. Next we'll see a significant change as God selects a nation through which He'll complete this purpose. This is the **Mosaic** age or dispensation characterized by a written law and messages being delivered through prophets and others chosen to reveal His will. Finally we'll review the **Christian** age or dispensation in which the fulfillment of God's promises is realized. Once we have a sense of these periods the next several videos will explore how they complement each other and unite the Bible story as a unique and powerful revelation.

3. Next

We'll continue this discussion in the next video as we look at **The Patriarchal Dispensation**.