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1. Introduction

On the day of Pentecost Christ's twelve disciples received power from God as the Holy Spirit fell on them. As Peter addressed the crowds gathered in Jerusalem they witnessed the beginning of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. In this video we'll discuss **The Christian dispensation**.

2. Areas to be covered

The preaching of the Gospel was a departure from what the Jews of the first century had been practicing religiously. Although they had waited for the Messiah and the deliverance of their nation their expectation of how God would do this was rooted in their own ideas. Today there's still confusion about the nature of the Gospel, its relationship with the Law and the kingdom of God. We'll take a look at the following characteristics of the Christian dispensation:

- a. Fulfillment
- b. Transition
- c. Kingdom
- d. Membership
- e. Duration

Let's take a look at each of these

3. Fulfillment

Christ stated that he came to fulfill the law and the prophets (**Matt 5.17**). We'll go into this statement and specific prophecies in more detail later. God promised Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through him. Jesus was a Jew, a descendant of Abraham in a physical sense and was the fulfillment of God's promise. Moses told the children of Israel that God would raise up a prophet from among them that was like him. This prophet would speak the words God gave him and those who refused to listen would be condemned (**Deut 18.18-19**). Christ preached the good news of this fulfillment and appointed twelve of his disciples to continue this after he ascended to his father. Prior to his death Christ told the disciples that he had many more things to tell them but they weren't able to bear them at that time. Christ stated, "*...when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*" (**John 16.13-14**). On the day of Pentecost, as the twelve were gathered together, the holy spirit fell on them as Christ promised. Peter, answering the accusation that the apostles were intoxicated explained what they were seeing. Peter stated, "*For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...*" (**Acts 2.15-16**). Peter then goes on to quote the prophecy from Joel stating

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“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2.17-21).

As he continued Peter explained who Christ was and declared that even David spoke of him in the Psalms. Finally Peter informed them that they had crucified the son of God who was now at the right hand of the Father. ***“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2.37-39).*** Although the door of salvation was open, and all families of the Earth would be blessed as God told Abraham, It would be some time before the Jewish converts realized this.

Some believe that a period of about ten years may have passed before the Gentiles were introduced to the Gospel. During that time persecution had risen as the new movement was seen as a threat to the traditions of the Law. Believers scattered because of this (Acts 8.1-2) but carried the Gospel with them everywhere they went. As time passed we're introduced to a Roman centurion who was a devout man who believed in God and gave ***“much alms to the people” (Acts 10.1-2)***. One day as he prayed, an angel appeared to him instructing him to send for Peter who was living in Joppa at the time. The angel told Cornelius that Peter would tell him what he needed to do. (Acts 10.1-6). Cornelius immediately dispatched his servants to summon Peter (Acts 10.7-8).

As the men from Cornelius approached Simon the tanner's house in Joppa, Peter was on the roof praying. At the same time Peter fell into a trance in which he was shown a vision. In this vision a vessel was let down from heaven containing ***“all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” (Acts 10.12)***. When he was commanded to kill and eat one of these creatures, Peter responded, ***“Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” (Acts 10.14)*** Peter was holding to the dietary restrictions that were part of the Law of Moses. The Jews had strict guidelines about what they could and couldn't eat and in spite of this being a command that was coming from God, Peter wasn't going to violate the Law or his conscience. After making this remark, the voice spoke to him again and told him ***“What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common...” (Acts 10.15)***. This was repeated three times after which Peter was told that three men had come seeking him and he needed to go with them (Acts 10.19-20) Now Peter was wondering what this vision meant as these things unfolded (Acts 10.17) and was told to go with the men ***“doubting nothing” (Acts 10.20)***. The voice also revealed they had been sent to find

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Peter.

When Peter arrived at Cornelius house he found that the centurion had gathered his friends and relatives to hear what Peter had to say. At that point Peter, who was starting to understand the vision he received, stated, “*Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*” (Acts 10.28). Cornelius had described the events that led up to his summons for Peter which clarified to the apostle that the gentiles weren’t to be considered unclean. Peter then declared, “*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*” (Acts 10.34). Peter then went on describing how Christ was crucified, raised from the dead and commanded the apostles to preach the remission of sins in his name (Acts 10.36-43). With the conversion of the first gentiles the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through him had begun. But problems would soon arise as devout Jews were faced with these new teachings.

4. Transition

When Peter returned to Jerusalem the other apostles and brethren heard that the Gospel had been preached to the Gentiles. The scriptures tell us that “*...they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*” (Acts 11.2-3). Peter related the events that transpired including the vision he received prior to leaving for Caesarea and the fact that the Holy Spirit had fallen on Cornelius’ household as it had on the day of Pentecost. Once the brethren heard that they were satisfied that the Gentiles were now included in the family of God. Circumcision however as well as other issues would continue to be problems as the church grew.

The early days of the church mark a transition away from the Law of Moses toward a more comprehensive law for all people. The Jews however had been living under the Law of Moses for over a thousand years so we can understand why this period would present difficulties. The Law contained numerous statements of things that were to be done, or avoided, and if the Jews failed they would be cut off from God and their nation. With that kind of mindset we can certainly understand why it would be difficult for them to embrace a change to what they had lived with for generations. The point to be made is that while there was resistance to changing a way of life, the scriptures had foretold these events. That will become clearer when we discuss the scheme of redemption. The nature of prophetic language is such that certain things are veiled and not immediately discernable but there were those even in the first century who were able to recognize Christ as the Messiah. When the events on the day of Pentecost unfolded there may have been some who were able to understand that this was the fulfillment of prophecy but for many there were great difficulties in grasping what was taking place.

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The Jews of the first century weren't any different than anyone else. They were committed to their cultural and spiritual heritage and perceived the new teachings by the apostles and Christians as a threat to their national identity. We can understand their spirit of nationalism especially since the majority consensus of the day saw the coming of the Messiah as a time of physical restoration that would liberate them from the Romans. As we look at this time period however we find that God knew there was a need for the word to spread and for the minds of many in the Jewish nation to learn to accept the presence of the Gospel. For that reason we see two things happen. The first is that there is a lengthy transitional time and secondly there was a provision made by the Lord to take the Gospel to the gentile world.

When the Hebrews prepared to cross the Jordan river into Canaan, they were told how this would happen. The land was populated by nations described as larger and mightier than them (**Deut 4.38**). God also told them how the taking of the land would proceed. "***I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.***" (**Ex 23.29-30**). This is a significant passage that tells us a lot about how God works.

The land had been promised to the children of Israel but God wasn't just handing it to them without any effort on their part. There was work to be done to receive the blessing the Lord was giving them. Throughout the scriptures we find that God will bless us but we're required to do some work. The same was true for the nation of Israel. God promised them the land but they had to take it from the people that were living there. To assist them in the accomplishment of this task God stated "***I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.***" (**Ex 23.27**). Coupled with the fear that fell on the pagan nations of Canaan and their faithfulness to the Lord, they would be successful. But note that this was not to happen in a day or even a year. The reality is that had God done that, the land would have become too dangerous due to the overgrowth of animal life. This demonstrates that God is a planner and executes His will slowly over time in ways that will allow for order to be maintained.

The spread of the Gospel in the first century was the same. The fact is, it would've been impractical for the apostles to begin teaching that the Law had been done away with and the people had to cease observing any part of it immediately. The church wouldn't have grown at all and would only have resulted in ill will with the Jews. Instead of attacking the Law and those devoted to it, the apostles and inspired teachers worked from a perspective of demonstrating that the Gospel being preached was what the Law had been pointing to. As we'll see in a later video there are numerous signs, types or shadows in the Law that pointed to what began on the day of Pentecost. A significant point that has to be remembered is the fact that the word being preached was from God. It was the Lord's desire to save the people not alienate them but nationalistic ideologies and traditionalism stood as a block to very many people at the time. We're really no different today. We all have our ideas of what's right and that often interferes with the ability to understand what God's word says. Another

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point that needs to be emphasized is that the Gospel completed the Law by fulfilling it and so wasn't in opposition to it, nor was it a revision of it. We'll talk about that in a more advanced video but God's laws don't conflict or compete with each other.

The problem of reaching out to the gentiles however continued and finally God resolved the issue. Saul of Tarsus was a devout Jew, had been a student of Gamaliel, had grown up with Herod and was a Roman citizen. His intense zeal for the Law and traditions of the Jewish nation led him to persecute Christians with the intent to destroy this movement that threatened a sacred way of life. Then Christ appeared to him. On his way to the city of Damascus to arrest Christians Saul and his companions saw a great light. Christ appeared to Saul and asked, "***Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?***" (Acts 9.4). When Saul asked who it was that addressed him Christ stated, "***I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.***" (Acts 9.5). Saul immediately knew that Christ was the Messiah and understood that he needed to do something. Christ instructed him to go into the city and he would be told what to do. A result of this encounter was that Saul was blind and had to be led into Damascus where he prayed and fasted for three days. A Christian in the city by the name of Ananias was told to go to Saul and when Ananias hesitated the Lord told him that Saul was a "***chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel...***" (Acts 9.15). After his conversion Saul changed his name to Paul and became known as the apostle to the Gentiles. The bulk of the New Testament was written by Paul and addresses many concerns and problems related to customs and commands under the Law and the Gospel.

As Paul, the other apostles and inspired teachers and prophets taught in the first century the relationship of the Law and the Gospel had to be continually clarified. Even Peter, who had preached the first gospel sermon to the gentiles, gave in to pressure to stop associating with non-Jews. Paul rebuked him for this describing the event in his letter to the Galatians (Gal 2.11-19). One of the problems centered around circumcision. There were Christians who taught that gentile Christians had to be circumcised. Paul deals with this in his writings pointing out that the physical circumcision had been replaced by the spiritual circumcision (Col 2.11) and details how that was done. The rest of the book of Galatians confronts errors that sought to direct gentiles and Jewish Christians back toward the traditions and practices of the Law. In spite of these efforts the majority of Jews held to the Law and the teachings of the Rabbis.

The writer of Hebrews isn't identified but may have been the apostle Paul. This book is an exploration of the ways in which the Law foreshadowed the Gospel. Paul in his letter to the Galatians refers to the Law as a "***school master to bring us unto Christ***" (Gal 3.24) and adds that after the faith was revealed through Christ there was no need for a schoolmaster any longer (Gal 3.25). The writer of Hebrews methodically demonstrates the temporal and imperfect nature of the Law and the excellence of the Gospel and the sacrifice of Christ. The writer shows that Christ was not only the perfect sacrifice for sin but he is also our high priest and mediator before God. As the book progresses the completeness of the Gospel is highlighted while the Law is described as coming to an end. The

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writer, discussing a prophecy by Jeremiah who wrote about the new covenant, states, “*In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*” (Heb 8.13). The Law was complete and had been fulfilled by Christ. The door was open to all people to become part of God’s family, a new kingdom that was not like that which was before.

5. Kingdom

The Lord’s prayer is frequently heard in a variety of circumstances. As Christ taught his followers how to pray he included the desire for the kingdom of God to be established. Today there are some who believe that the kingdom is still in the future and that Christ will return one day to sit on a throne in Jerusalem where he’ll rule the nations. Some even teach that Christ was killed before he could finish his mission but will return to complete the task. Although there are many devout people who believe these teachings there are problems with them. First, God doesn’t fail to accomplish anything. Secondly the plan of God becomes dependent on humanity in order to be successful. As I’ve discussed in previous lessons, God’s will is done in spite of the actions of his followers or anyone else. Christ came into the world for the purpose of being offered as the perfect sacrifice for sin. We’ll discuss this in greater depth in another lesson but I want to emphasize that Christ not only died as planned but was raised by God on the third day as planned as well. On the day of Pentecost the church or spiritual kingdom was established as the prophets foretold and Christ stated he would build. But how do we know this to be the case. Let’s examine what the scriptures have to say about the kingdom and how it was to change.

We’ve covered the story of God’s promise to Abraham that his seed would return to the land of Canaan. We saw how that happened during the days of Moses and Joshua and the failure of the children of Israel to completely drive out the native peoples (**Judg 1.26 - 2.3**). Over time however the kingdom grew and increased and was blessed by God as long as they were faithful to the Lord. One of the arguments that is made to support the idea of Christ returning and establishing a physical kingdom is that the land as promised by God was never completely controlled by Israel. God told Abraham that his offspring would have the land from the river Euphrates to the river of Egypt. This promise was fulfilled as Israel reached its greatest territory during the reign of Solomon whose kingdom stretched from the “*river*”, indicating the Euphrates, to the river of Egypt (**1 Kng 4.21-25**). This was the fulfillment of the land promise made to the seed of Abraham. So where’s the problem then?

The land given to the children of Israel was done as part of a greater plan to save mankind. As I pointed out in an earlier video an environment was needed to bring the Messiah into the world. The physical nation of Israel did exactly that. We’ve also covered the blessings and curses Moses issued to the Hebrews during his farewell address to them. The latter chapters of Deuteronomy emphatically state two important truths. First, the land and nation was given to them because of the faith of Abraham, not their righteousness. Secondly, if they ever began to neglect the Lord and practice the

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abominations of the pagan nations before them they would be driven from the land, made to serve other gods in a strange country and scattered through all the nations (**Deut 28.63-65**). In other words, their nation would continue to exist so long as they were faithful. As we saw in previous videos, the children of Israel eventually fell away and angered the Lord until there was no remedy (**2 Chron 36.16**). He allowed them to be overtaken by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The Assyrians eventually destroyed the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah was carried away into Babylon for a period of seventy years (**Jer 25.12, Dan 9.1-3**). In the prophecies by Moses and Jeremiah as well as some of the minor prophets there was also a promise of a remnant that would return to complete the work of God. The prophet Habakkuk prayed for God to resume his work (**Hab 3.1-2**) and remember His people. This was fulfilled beginning with the return of the remnant under Ezra the scribe, the governor Zerubbabel, the prophet Haggai, Nehemiah, the prophet Zechariah and Joshua the high priest. The Temple was rebuilt, the walls restored and the people resettled into their land. But things weren't going to be as they were before. Notable changes had taken place and would not be reversed. We'll take a look at some of these as they're relevant to the discussion.

From the time of the return of the remnant to the time of Christ there was no king sitting on a throne in Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David (**Matt 1.13**), served as governor but wasn't a king. By the time of the first century the Jews continued to look for a time when their nation would be restored to its former status. That wasn't going to happen. As Jeremiah wrote he mentions the evil of the nation and their rejection of God's law. Jeremiah talks about Jeconiah, also known as Coniah, one of the kings during the early Babylonian invasions. He states, "***Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.***" (**Jer 22.30**). This statement by the Lord eliminated an earthly king to sit on the throne. His law had been broken, his covenant despised and because of that their kingdom was being taken away. The later restoration would not be physical but spiritual. When Christ stood before Pilate he stated, "***My kingdom is not of this world...***" (**John 18.36**).

So let's take a look at what we know

1. The land promise made to Abraham was fulfilled during the days of Solomon (**1 Kng 4.21-25**)
2. The kingdom was lost due to sin and neglect of the Law as God warned (**Deut 28.63-65**)
3. There wouldn't be a king sitting on a throne in Jerusalem again (**Jer 22.30**)
4. The throne of David however would be eternal (**2 Sam 7.16**)
5. The remnant returned, the Temple was rebuilt and the walls restored (**Ezra, Nehemiah**)
6. The rebuilt temple symbolized a future house of greater glory (**Hag 2.3-9**)
7. Christ stated that he would build his church (**Matt 16.18**)
8. Christ's kingdom was not of this world (**John 18.36**)
9. The kingdom, the church was established on Pentecost (**Acts 2**)

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As we review this list we can see that nothing was left undone. There are no promises that weren't kept. There's no promise of a physical nation being restored and there's no indication that the Jews have an exclusive membership in this new kingdom. So then who's it for and how does that happen?

6. Membership

For a thousand years the children of Israel were known as God's people. They had been blessed, given land, a nation and later able to return from exile. Their identity as God's chosen people was exemplified by circumcision and the Law of Moses. Their relationship with Abraham as his offspring became a point of pride and self-righteousness to a degree. We can see this in a statement made by John as he prepared the way for Christ. Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees had gathered to hear him. John addressed them as he stated, "*And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*" (Matt 3.9). The Jews were confident in their relationship with God as the chosen nation. What they failed to see was that their selection was for the purpose of bringing Christ into the world. Christ's sacrifice would make it possible for all people to be part of God's family, not just the Jews. As the Gospel spread and was finally carried to the Gentiles this wasn't something that the majority of Jews could tolerate. The first persecution against the church began with the Jewish authorities who saw this doctrine as a threat to their traditions and the Law. Their unwillingness to open their minds and accept the fact that the Gospel was God's completion of the Law blinded them with hatred toward Christians.

The Jews were born into the family of God. They inherited their religion and spiritual status based on their ancestry. There was no choice involved. They were required to keep the Law and remember the Lord. Those born into Jewish families were dependent on their parents following the commands of God. Male children had to be circumcised on the eighth day or they would be cut off from their people and the Lord. To say that this was a religion of ritual and tradition would miss the fact that many were devout and committed to being faithful to God and served from the heart. There were others however who made a pretense of being faithful while serving their own greed and desires. This was the situation in the first century and was a subject of rebuke by both John and Christ. When Christ began to spread the news of the Gospel the people were hungry for true spirituality and honesty. The word Jesus proclaimed was done with power and the miracles he performed attested to the fact that he was a prophet sent from God. The Gospel however changed the way in which one comes into a relationship with God.

The prophets had noted that in the last days the Lord would establish a kingdom or house that all nations would flow to (Isa 2.1-4, Micah 4.1-3). Jeremiah stated that God would establish a new covenant with his people that was not like the old (Jer 31.31-34). Hosea states, "*...and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people,*

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Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” (Hos 2.23). Christ also indicated that there would be a change in the relationship between God and humanity. Speaking of his death Christ stated, *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10.16).* The apostle Paul discusses the inclusion of the Gentiles in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes, *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2.11-13).* In spite of these things the majority of Jews refused to accept the message of the Gospel and continued to persecute Christians. Paul was deeply troubled by this and desired that his countrymen would open their minds and see the truth. He writes, *“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Rom 10.1-4).* Being a child of God was no longer a matter of who your parents were.

So, if inheritance was no longer a factor how were people made part of God’s family. The process that we see in the New Testament is very simple but remains one of the most contested aspects of belief today as it was in the first century. Christ told his disciples, *“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matt 28.18-20).* In this great commission Christ indicates that the apostles were to teach what they had been commanded, they were to do so throughout the world and they were to baptize those who believed. But what commands would they be teaching?

Christ told his disciples that he would send the *“comforter”*, or *“spirit of truth”* who would guide them and teach them what to say (John 16.7-13). Before he ascended into heaven Christ told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received this power from God (Acts 1.4-8). After the church was established we see that the Holy Spirit revealed the word to the twelve and is referred to as the *“apostles doctrine”* (Acts 2.42). As we examine the history of the early church we see that believers followed a pattern in their belief. Obviously they had to hear the message proclaimed containing the fact that Christ was the son of God, was sent to the earth to die as the perfect sacrifice for sin, was killed but then raised on the third day by God. Hearing this would lead to belief. Those who believed were motivated to make a change in how they thought and determined to change their way of life as well. This was affirmed by an open confession of their belief in Christ as the son of God followed by a willingness to be immersed in water. The scriptures reveal that those who completed

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these steps or the appropriate combination of them were added to the church by God Himself.

There are many who reject this and state that no such “plan of salvation” can be found in the New Testament. This is incorrect and we’ll look at a specific passage in a later video that clarifies this process and bring these steps together. We’ll also take a look at a comparison of examples of conversion recorded in the book of Acts and see what each person or group did in each situation. For now we can note that being in a relationship with God no longer depended on who an individual’s parents were. Those who believed on God through Christ and obeyed were made part of the new kingdom, the church.

8. Duration

Simply stated, the Christian dispensation is the final age of the world. At a time that God deems is appropriate he’ll send Christ back in judgment and time will come to an end. We’ll have a longer discussion of the last days in a later video but for now we’ll review what the scriptures tell us about this age.

Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied that in the “*last days*” the mountain of the Lord’s house would be built (**Isa 2.1-2, Micah 4.1-3**). As I’ve established earlier this was fulfilled in the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. The writer of Hebrews states that God has spoken to us in these last days by his son Jesus Christ. John also states that the signs of the last days had arrived due to the spirit of “*antichrist*” that was already in the world (**1 John 2.18**). All that remains is the final judgment, destruction of the world and the end of time. We’ll discuss that in a later video in more depth.

9. Next

In our next video we’ll begin taking a look at the way in which God’s scheme of redemption was concealed in the Old Testament and then revealed in the New Testament. We’ll discuss the concept of types and how these appear and can be identified in the scriptures. Join me in the next video for **The Scheme of Redemption Part 1 - Mystery Of The Ages**.