

We Would See Jesus: The Son of God

“When the Fullness of the Time Had Come”

Troy Spradlin

Why did Jesus Christ come to earth when He did? What was so special about the particular era in which He came versus another? For thousands of years in advance, God revealed to man through His Holy Word and His appointed prophets that a Messiah was coming. Some had harkened to the calls of Jehovah and had been expecting a divine Redeemer. When He came, it changed the course of history forever. The presence of Jesus Christ upon the earth is the central point of all history. The calendars produced today depicting ancient timeframes point toward His brief incarnation and then proceed from it. Likewise, in a motion similar to a rock thrown into the water, Christ *IS* the epicenter from which a new heaven and a new earth now emanate (Isa. 66:22). This is known as the Christian Dispensation. His presence has blessed all nations of the earth (Gal. 3:8-14). In light of these facts, one might ask, “If this event was determined by God to be such an epic moment, why then did He choose to send His Son at *that* particular time?”

To answer this question, one must take a cursory glance at secular history, but more importantly, explore what the Word of God has to say. It doesn't take long to ascertain that the arrival of Jesus Christ in the world was the culmination of a grand scheme ordained and orchestrated by Jehovah. Galatians 4:4 declares that “...

“WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME”

when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” [All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted]. It is evident that before the earth was ready to receive His Son, God had a plan and a criteria which He desired to be fulfilled. When we study the elements of this plan as found in the Bible and take into consideration the circumstances and the environment surrounding the Messiah’s appointed time on Earth, it becomes quite apparent that the Savior of man came at *precisely* the right time. It is a fact that should spark hope in all mankind, as well as provide a great deal of strength and encouragement to the faith of every Christian.

**A PERFECT PLAN:
“THE FULLNESS OF TIME”**

The entire Bible is about one person—Jesus Christ. Every character, every component and every circumstance written upon its blessed pages are connected to Him in some fashion or another. They each constitute one of the various threads which make up a fabric interlaced with the “golden thread” of the Christ binding the story of the Bible together. The Holy Scriptures are comprised of several volumes of spiritual history regarding God’s arrangement for redeeming man, an arrangement which had its roots formed in the Garden of Eden. It was there where He put His eternal plan into motion.

The events leading up to God sending forth His Son resemble the magnification process: a process of narrowing the focus from a large scale down to a very minute scale. Imagine how one might begin with a global perspective in order to determine which city within a given continent and country he is located. After doing so, he may then look at a municipal street map in order to

establish the exact position where he is standing. This is what mapping programs on our computers allow us to do, to “zoom” our viewpoint in or out in a similar manner. God revealed His plan in a comparable way, by beginning from a grand scale. Genesis 3:15 is the start of this narrowing process. God initiated His plan by eliminating half of the population of the earth in His promise that a male Redeemer would be born of a woman.

The focus becomes even tighter when one reads a little further in Genesis. In God’s covenant made with the great patriarch, Abraham, He narrowed the criteria for the Messiah down to one nation, a chosen people, thus eliminating all other nationalities (Gen. 22:18). It must be observed here that the word “seed” is used in its singular form and not the plural. This is important because of the confusion the Jews had as to who the Messiah was to be. They believed the Messiah to be the nation of Israel. The apostle Paul clarified this misinterpretation in Galatians 3:16.

Finally, before exiting the Genesis story, a single tribe emerged as the chosen family through which God carried His promise. In Genesis 49:10, God indicated that the Messiah would descend from a royal kingship by the use of the word “scepter.” Judah would be the one tribe within the nation of Israel in whom the Messiah would descend. The kingship lineage of this tribe was realized when David was crowned in 2 Samuel 2:4.

This narrowing process is evidence of God’s providence at work. It provides the catalyst to all the subsequent and related events throughout the entirety of man’s history until the arrival of the Christ. It gives further clarification to statements such as, “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites **is not yet full**” (Gen. 15:16, emp. added).

"WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME"

Couple that with the declarations made by the prophet Amos (Amos 1:1-2:9) or the apostle Paul (Rom. 11:25-27), and the blueprints of God's purposes become more vividly clear. History reveals that God used both righteous and evil people in the form of either nations or individuals to further His purposes.

Perhaps Daniel provides the most revealing portrait of God's divine scheme: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). This prediction is followed by another powerful prophecy regarding four different kingdoms that would come to pass before the Messiah would appear in His glory (Dan. 7:1-28). These four kingdoms were God's instruments used to prepare the world for Jesus. They were the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Even at the time when Daniel was prophesying, God was using nations as His personal agents, such as the Assyrian kingdom.

For the sake of His purposes, God blessed the Assyrian Empire. They had become God's implement of destruction against the Northern kingdom of Israel because of their iniquity (Isa. 10:5). God used Assyria for His divine purposes to prepare the world for Jesus. For the sake of His purposes, God blessed the Babylonian Empire (Hab. 1:5-6). Through Nebuchadnezzar, Judah was carried off into captivity and the holy city of Jerusalem was destroyed with all its grandeur. In this process, He preserved a remnant who would provide the continuation of the seed of promise (Joel 2:32). For the sake of His purposes, God blessed the Medo-Persian Empire. Their contribution of laws and decrees helped shape the society

which God was developing. The remnant which He had preserved was allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of Jehovah (Hag. 1:14). The seed for the Messiah would spring forth from this remnant. For the sake of His purposes, God blessed the Grecian Empire. Their contribution of a world government and a new perspective among men helped shape the political arena which God was developing. During this phase, a common language was introduced, eliminating the hindrance of a language barrier.

Then finally, for the sake of His purposes, God blessed the Roman Empire. Their contribution provided the final ingredients necessary for the Messiah's entrance into the world. Looking back upon Daniel's prophecy and comparing it to secular history, the workings of the Lord's providence shine forth brilliantly.

Indeed, if one compares the celestial "magnification process" alongside the divine prophecies within the Old Testament regarding the Messiah, it can be seen that the sacred text paints a beautiful portrait of God preparing the human race for the advent of His Anointed One. Plenty of time was allowed to elapse between articulation of prophecy and its fulfillment, thereby demonstrating Christ's deity (Miller 16). The soul of man was ripe for harvest and God's eternal plan was culminating to that central point in history. It would be a perfect time for our Savior to enter into the earthly realm. According to God's plan, it would be "the fullness of time."

**A PERFECT PERIOD:
"GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON"**

When we look around at the world in which we live, it is apparent that we live in a great era. There are so many blessings that we enjoy. There is a relative peace

“WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME”

throughout most of the world that exists because there are no oppressive empires or global wars taking place. One is able to travel to just about any point on the globe because of the well developed transportation services which utilize highways, skyways and railways. Private or mass communication is possible through vast public media sources like television, radio, newspaper, internet and personal phone systems. Religious freedom is present throughout the majority of the earth's nations. All of these blessings would make it a perfect time for God to have announced His Son's arrival upon the earth. Due to all the factors just mentioned, this would have been a perfect time for Jesus to have come and establish His church. So why didn't God wait until now to employ all the resources of today for spreading the gospel? The answer may be surprising. It is because all these same components were in existence during the first century but in a different form. In fact, they had come into existence simultaneously for the very first time since man had been cast from the Garden of Eden. Of course, there were no cell phones nor automobiles during the Biblical age, but the same function and aspect of every essential component was still present.

When Jesus Christ appeared on the earth, everything was perfectly in place. Because of the various contributions of the preceding world powers, mentioned in the previous section, the earth was now properly prepared to receive God's blessing upon it. All of the critical factors were in position to facilitate God's ultimate purpose, the sending forth of His Son and the subsequent spreading of the gospel to all of man. A brief study of the various elements found in the first century provides a wealth of knowledge for understanding why Jesus came when He did. Let's examine the New Testament world.

Peace

In the centuries prior to the world being introduced to Jesus, there was all but constant strife and turmoil in the form of wars, conflicts and skirmishes fought among the nations. A cursory glimpse at secular history reveals a steady succession of various battles with constant bloodshed down through the ages, involving most kingdoms and provinces. This was not the case, however, during the time of Christ's ministry on earth. There were a few minor skirmishes that still existed on the outer borders of the Roman Empire, but the majority of the constituents of Rome enjoyed a relative peace throughout the land known as *Pax Romana* (Jeffers 35). The Romans fiercely defended this major pillar of their society by dispersing imperial soldiers to every corner and crevice of the empire.

One of the few things Rome had no tolerance for were insurrections. In reality, there were only two things governmental officials seemed to care about: the collection of taxes and that any rebellions be put down. As long as there was peace, then the citizens of a province could enjoy Roman protection. Ironically, this imperial policy provided the catalyst for much of the mayhem that persisted in Palestine. The Jews despised the Romans so much that they had developed various "political parties," such as the Zealots, or the infamous Sicarii, who schemed and planned ways to release the Hebrews from Roman rule. When Christ walked the streets of Jerusalem, the Jews used the Roman laws of sedition to get Him crucified. They did this by citing that Pilate was "no friend of Caesar" if he let Jesus go (John 19:12). That was a serious charge under the laws of Rome! Since the Jews were prohibited from enacting the death penalty themselves, they appealed to the Roman government to advance their evil designs. Yet,

“WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME”

despite the various tumultuous circumstances within Palestine, the rest of the “known world” (which was the Roman Empire) basked in the joy of relative peace. It was the perfect time for God to present the “Prince of Peace” to His people (Isa. 9:6).

Travel

Peace within the empire was afforded by the development of Roman colonies and, as already mentioned, the presence of Roman soldiers throughout the land. But, in order to disperse the troops more swiftly and efficiently from one point within the empire to another, an extensive and superb road system had to be constructed in order to facilitate the ease of movement. The Romans were far more advanced than all previous nations in their road building and construction techniques. Their roads withstood centuries of use. Before that time, roads had never been substantially developed beyond the typical worn-down foot path or the rudimentary cutting away of foliage to make room for passage. As an interesting side note, sometimes salt that had become useless was discarded on walking paths to prevent further plant growth from obscuring the passageway. This practice was alluded to by Jesus (Matt. 5:13).

One of the more famous Roman roads was the *Via Egnatia*, or Egnatian Way, which traversed northern Greece. Paul and the apostles used this road to travel to Philippi and Thessalonica. The expansive road system throughout the Roman Empire aided in the spread of the gospel, as the sandals of many of our Lord’s disciples trod across those ancient stone highways while making their way to their next destination. It was the perfect time to fulfill the command given by Jesus to “go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark

16:15). The world had been properly prepared for that moment.

Communication

With the conquering of foreign nations, as the Grecian and Roman empires had so successfully done, came the inherit problem of integrating foreign language. It was often the case that the defeated nation must relinquish her native tongue and assimilate the language of the victor. Before the New Testament era, traveling from one nation to a nearby nation, or from one tribal area to another, could result in encountering more than one language or dialect. This made it very difficult to communicate. However, during the time of our Lord's presence, there was a "universal" language that had pervaded almost every corner of the known world—Greek. This phenomenon came about through the period of conquest delivered by the hand of Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.). His influence had a radical impact on the cultural aspect of language.

Although many provinces retained their native speech, Greek had become the dominate language of the first century. In Palestine, the average Jewish man was without formal education, yet he was bilingual. Not only did he speak a portion of his native Hebrew tongue, called Aramaic, but he was also fluent in the more widely used Hellenistic Greek. There is simply no other language known to man that could be better used to convey a divine message (Mattox 29). This common language became known as *Koine Greek*, a language of the common people. Not only did this universal language perpetuate the spreading of the gospel, but it also helped to preserve it throughout history. That is because by the Middle Ages, *Koine Greek* had evolved into Medieval Greek. Thus, it was

"WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME"

through the conservation of the original dialect that the meaning and influence of words became forever crystallized in world literature. It was the perfect time to be able to teach every man in the whole world (Col. 1:5-6) the good news about Jesus Christ without a language barrier.

Religious Atmosphere

The religious environment of the first century was a scene of immense turmoil and confusion. By the time Jesus came into the world, Jewish tradition had become of greater importance than the original commandment of God (Mattox 27). In addition, various meeting halls known as "synagogues" (a Greek word meaning "gathering") had also been constructed throughout the Roman provinces and were commonplace in the villages of Israel (Burge 71). Jesus and the apostles used these places to preach and teach about the kingdom of God (John 18:20; Acts 18:18-19). Synagogues had developed during the Babylonian captivity period and allowed the captured Hebrews a means to differentiate themselves from the pagan religions of their captors. Without being able to make sacrifice at the temple, synagogue worship centered on study, corporate prayer, debate and adoration of Yahweh. The development of the various traditions and the introduction of the synagogue had radically changed the divine precedent set forth by God. These departures paved the way for the rise of distinct "sects" of Jewish religiosity, such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, Essenes and the Herodians. Each had their own interpretation of the Scriptures, their own philosophy to which they subscribed and their own mandates which they enacted. The perplexity created by these divergent factions fostered a desire within the heart

of the average Hebrew for some type of singular direction and solidarity.

In addition, the Roman Empire was a melting pot of religious practices. They promoted polytheism and were very tolerant of other religions, in which they often incorporated their captured nations' deities within their own. By the time of Jesus, Rome had also instituted emperor worship. Caesar claimed to be deity and demanded that all citizens honor and worship him. These various pagan religions had no concept of guilt. A person could be very religious and very immoral at the same time, for the pagan religions did nothing to promote personal purity or social improvement. Outside of Judaism, there were no voices raised against immoral activities like prostitution, mass slaughter for sport, human sacrifice or other depravities (Mattox 26). This caused many of the Gentiles to turn to the synagogues because of what they had to offer: one God with moral standards. Greek philosophy and its attendant idolatry appealed to the intellect but left the soul empty (Hailey 238). However, several difficulties faced the converted Gentile. Such Jewish practices as the strict dietary regulations, circumcision or avoiding contact with other Gentiles inhibited many God fearers from conjoining with the Hebrews. When Christianity was introduced to the world, it became very appealing to the Gentile for its simplicity (Jeffers 106). This factor indeed provided a "field white unto harvest" (John 4:35). From a religious perspective, the world was ready for the Great Counselor (Isa. 9:6).

Supplementary Components

A mixture of other factors also contributed to the perfect time for the arrival of Jesus. In regards to the religious atmosphere, there were some 150 baptistries,

“WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME”

known as *Mikvahs*, in and around Jerusalem during the first century. Seventy of these are still in use today (www.jerusalem.muni.il). These were constructed for the purification rituals of thousands of pilgrims who converged upon Jerusalem as they made their way to the temple for the divinely prescribed occasions. When Peter convicted his fellow countrymen of their sins on Pentecost (Acts 2), it would certainly have been feasible to facilitate 3,000 baptisms in one day (Burge 235).

Another interesting aspect of Palestinian religion was that Roman coins were considered to be idolatrous. The Jews would not allow anyone to pay the temple tax with Roman money. This information provides a little more insight to the question presented to Jesus by the Pharisees and Herodians regarding whether or not it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar (Mark 12:14-17).

The existence of slavery in the first century is a noteworthy study regarding life in the New Testament era. Slavery in the ancient world of the Roman empire was much different than the modern concept of slavery. Slaves of ancient times were not tied to any specific ethnic group, as compared to more recent history of slaves which is more closely associated with African ethnicity (Jeffers 220). The Romans did not consider slaves inferior by nature, nor did they hold any racial preference. Their main concern regarded social status. Slaves generally did not question the existence of slavery and many did not see anything morally wrong with it. There were many slaves who were doctors, teachers, cooks and managers, because the ancient populace looked at these occupations as demeaning to status.

An interesting aspect of ancient slavery is that many slaves could actually increase their status. Because some people entered into slavery willfully, the acts of

abuse were different. Most slaves were treated quite well and regarded as valuable property. This was unlike the slave trade of America, where slaves were regularly beaten and abused, often causing financial loss to the owner. In contrast to American slaves, who had no hope or expectation for gaining freedom, ancient slaves hoped to win their freedom with good service and time. The possibility of freedom being granted was a strong incentive to slaves of the Roman-Greco world. It is estimated that there were approximately 60 million slaves in the empire, so there were many who would have understood the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, who paralleled slavery with being released from sin through a redeemer.

These are just a few of the many curious and fascinating details about life in ancient Palestine. Each one adds to the fact that it was indeed the perfect time for Jesus to establish His church upon the earth (Matt. 16:18). The portrait is clear, mankind was spiritually and morally depraved; he was primed for the arrival of the Messiah, so God "*sent forth His Son.*"

CONCLUSION

The answer to our question—"Why did God choose to send His Son during the particular time known as the New Testament era?"—is that it was, in every aspect, **the perfect time**. God crowned His glorious plan in a dark manger the moment the first whimpers were emitted from the infant Jesus. The world had been adequately prepared and shaped by the Great Potter's hands (Isa. 41:25; 64:8). Jesus proceeded from that point to fulfill all the prophecies, predictions and forethought revealed by Jehovah up to that moment.

"WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME"

Regrettably, and despite the fact that we, as a human race, have achieved so many technological advances in the past century, the question still remains, "Are we truly any wiser than our ancient counterparts?" Man's inhumanity to man has simply not subsided in the least. Humankind is no less prideful, no less superstitious, no less violent and no less rebellious than he was 2,000 years ago. If we strip away the external façade of mechanization, electronics and modern amenities, and look solely at the human character of individuals in any given society, we can clearly see that man's nature has not really changed since creation. We have not developed or evolved into some super intelligent species, but instead, exactly what God intended us to be—dependent upon His grace.

It is no accident that we find that ancient world so completely prepared for the coming of Christ. The Roman government of the first century had provided a central world power which promoted order and peace; there was an imperial coinage system that advanced international trade and travel made possible by a vast road network; and there was a universal language utilized by all regions. The moral vacuum that existed in that day caused people to look for something better (Hailey 239). Many looked in the synagogues. Those who looked with the right kind of heart found the Savior, because "they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). All of this made it possible for the Lord to establish His kingdom on earth and became a great help to the spread of the gospel (Mattox 29). The world was ready. The fullness of time had come and God sent forth His Son. What a marvelous blessing!

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