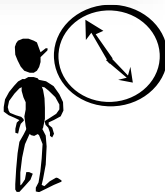


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(every other week)

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

The Fullness of Time

By Jefferson David Tant

In two passages, the apostle Paul uses the expression “the fullness of the time,” and this expression is very “full” in its meaning. Among other things, it shows God’s wisdom in preparing the world for the coming of his Son, and as we look at the condition of the world in the first century, we are made to appreciate the marvelous way in which God’s plan was perfectly executed. Consider the two passages where Paul uses the expression.

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (Ephesians 1:9-10).

“So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:3-5).

Christ used a similar expression in Mark 1:14-15: *“Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”*

Just what is meant by “the fullness of the time?” A look at the world at that time helps us to understand the wisdom of God, and the unfolding of his plan at just the right moment in the history of the world. Just what was the world like at that time?

The Political Situation

This was Rome’s Golden Age, as Caesar had unified the world. After some 500 years of war, there was peace —

“pax Romana.” Thus there was freedom of travel, and travel was facilitated by an excellent system of roads and shipping. Those who went about preaching the gospel had no difficulty in crossing borders or having to deal with different governments, visas, or passports. The gospel freely went into Europe, Africa, India, etc.

This peace and union also facilitated the universal language — Greek. Alexander the Great encountered a problem in giving orders to his generals as he was on his world conquest, for he had to give orders in five languages. From these five dialects, he constructed a verb system which in time became the Koine Greek — the common language of the first century — the New Testament time. Thus when the gospel went into the world, language was not a problem, for Greek was spoken in every nation along with the native dialects.

The Jewish Dispersion

Not only had the Jews been scattered to some extent under the Assyrians and Babylonians, but Alexander also contributed to their spread. He was impressed with their culture and system and took Jews with him as his administrators into the cities and nations which he conquered. One historian tells that Ananias, a Jewish High Priest, went to Alexander outside Jerusalem and showed him the prophecies about Alexander.

With this dispersion, wherever the apostles went, they had a ready audience with Jews. We remember that when Paul went into a city, he usually went first to a Jewish synagogue. *“But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, ‘Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.’ Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ‘Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen...’”* (Acts 13:14-16. See also 14:1; 17:1, etc.).

The Geographic Location

When one looks at a first-century world map, it is impressive to note what was at civilization’s center — Palestine, the land of Canaan, Israel. Europe was north, Asia was east, and Africa was south. In tracing trade and commerce routes, it is noteworthy that they ran right through the Land of Promise that God had given to Abraham centuries before. This further facilitated the spread of the gospel, as tradesmen and other travelers would have certainly had some contact with Christians as they passed through on the trade routes.

There are at least 16 nations mentioned that had gathered at Pentecost in Acts 2. The central location of the temple in Jerusalem certainly made it more convenient for the scattered Jews to come for the appointed feast. It would have been much more difficult for those from Africa or Arabia to come to Rome or Spain.

Evidently, the new converts on Pentecost remained in Jerusalem for a time, being instructed and grounded in their new faith. But in time they needed to go back home and

take the gospel with them. This came about upon the persecution that came in Acts 8 following the stoning of Stephen. *“Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word”* (Acts 8:1, 4).

God certainly knew what he was doing when he brought Abraham to the land of Canaan some 1900 years before. He had it all planned out, even before the creation. Indeed, Paul wrote of the fulfillment of God’s plan which *“was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ephesians 3:11).

The Economic Situation

The Roman Empire had the appearance of wealth and luxury, but down below that façade, there was great unrest and extreme poverty. Two of every three men on the streets of Rome were slaves — mere chattel. Indeed, in many areas of the realm things were at a crisis level. The aftermath of the war, the colossal extravagance of Herod the Great in Palestine, the heavy burden of taxation, coupled with overpopulation and the lack of adequate food supplies in many areas, brought about a great depression.

Life was bleak, and there seemed little hope that things would improve.

The Moral Condition

In one of Swinburne’s poems, he claimed that Christ was a spoil-sport and a wet blanket on the happy, innocent, and carefree world of his time. He thought the world was content in its worship of nature and the gods Zeus, Dionysus, Aphrodite, etc. *“Thou hast conquer’d, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath.”*

From a historical perspective, such a statement is nonsense. Paul described the world’s real condition in Romans 1 — a world sunk in the depths of moral hopelessness. Paul cites the world’s mess in a long recitation of the sins of the world at that time.

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those

things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:21-32).

Throughout the empire, nobler souls viewed the world as pursuing its riotous way to disaster and ultimate destruction.

The Religious World

The Roman gods were either dead or dying. People were experimenting with new ideas and religions. On one hand, they had imported an outlandish batch of Eastern gods until they had so many that the philosophers joked about the overcrowding on Mt. Olympus, the dwelling place of the gods. During this time, the religion of Caesar worship appeared. The Christians in the seven cities of the Revelation letter were suffering for their refusal to bow down to “Lord Caesar.” This was the center of the cult of emperor worship.

But in parts of the empire, men were looking for a vision, as if peering into the dawn for the first glimpse of the brilliant sun. When John came preaching the Kingdom message, many were asking, “Is this the Messiah?” Were there not others in the world like the Wise Men, who came from afar to see the wonder that God had sent into the world?

There is evidence that even Buddha had prophesied of this momentous coming. Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) was contemporary with the prophet Daniel, and most certainly would have had knowledge of Daniel’s escape from the lions, as King Darius issued an edict to the lands under his jurisdiction.

“Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: ‘May your peace abound! I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions” (Dan. 6:25-27).

Buddha lived in the region we now know as Nepal, which was a part of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

It is recorded that a priest asked Buddha about the way of salvation. “The Old Brahman priest asked further, ‘So what should we all do?’ The Buddha answered, ‘Keep on making merit and look for another Holy One who will come and help the world and all of you in the future.’ Then the old Brahman priest asked, ‘What will the characteristics of the Holy One be like?’ The Buddha answered, ‘The Holy One who will keep the world in the future will be like this: in the palm of his hands and in the flat of his feet

will be the design of a disk, in his side will be a stab wound; and his forehead will have many marks like scars.” Is this not an accurate description of the wounds Christ suffered when he was crucified?

There is no evidence that Buddha intended to start a new religion, but long after his death, men launched a new religion — Buddhism. I know a man who has done much missionary work in Cambodia, and he reports the conversion of large numbers of Buddhists who see Christ as a fulfillment of Buddha’s prophecies. Even Buddhist priests have certified his writings as authentic.

The area in which Buddha lived was the same general area from which the Magi came to worship the Christ-child. The point is that there were people in the world looking for someone to come besides just Jews.

Thus, in these six areas mentioned, we see it all “coming together.” The world was ready for this momentous event! It was truly “in the fullness of the time.” God, in His wisdom, had it all planned out.

Reverencing the Name of God

By David Gibson

I once overheard an older woman ask a middle-aged man as he entered the post office, “Are they closed?” “Lord, no!” he said. “They ain’t closed.”

In a Dallas hospital waiting room, several women were passing the time in conversation. One of them mentioned that a certain man they knew was 38. “God Almighty!” one of the other women exclaimed in surprise. Later one of the group said, “O God, yeah, we used to run with each other all the time.”

These remarks are all too typical these days. The use of “God,” “Lord” and variations thereof are so commonplace that hardly anyone seems to think much about it.

That’s the problem. People don’t think. They speak of God without really thinking of **Him**. God’s name is used not to refer to Him in a proper manner or to appeal to Him in prayer, but His name is employed to express surprise or dismay — and sometimes it is used merely as verbal filler.

How do you suppose God feels about hearing His name being used so trivially and irreverently?

Careless speech often betrays a careless heart. How can we pray, “Hallowed be thy name,” and then misuse His name the next time we feel the need to vent our emotions?

I am indebted to an article on this subject for calling my attention to the following passage: “*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and esteem His name*” (Malachi 3:16 NASB).

“*Holy and awesome is His name*” (Psalms 111:9).