



IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

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Welcome and thanks for joining me today for Let the Bible Speak. I value your time and appreciate your interest in the Word of God. Despite what many claim, we do not know the exact time when Jesus was born. What we **do** know is that He **was** born near the beginning of the first century and His brief life changed this world forever. His coming was not coincidental or a matter of happenstance. God didn't simply allow events to take their course and Jesus be born whenever circumstances brought it to pass. For one reason, His conception involved a miracle which means that it was a supernatural act on the part of God, the Holy Spirit, which brought the birth of Jesus to pass. But God did not randomly choose a point in time for Jesus to enter time and space. He specifically chose a time from the foundation of the world and orchestrated history to bring Christ's birth to pass exactly when it occurred. The apostle Paul affirms this in his letter to the Galatian church in chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. Those verses declare: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." When the fulness of the time had come: What was Paul referring to? If Jesus came at the perfect time, why is that the case? What made it the RIGHT time for God to become man? Why not immediately after the fall? Why not in our own day? We'll explore that today in our study: IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME, after a song from the congregation.

Though God grants to man free will or free moral agency, God is still sovereign and ultimately in control of His universe. Whatever He determines must come to pass will come to pass. He can providentially orchestrate human events to bring His purposes to pass and His promises to fruition. God's plan of salvation has existed since before the beginning of time. The bible says that Christ is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. That necessitated Christ entering His creation in human form. The nearly four-thousand years of history that are recorded in the Old Testament reveal to us God's careful and long preparations for bringing His Son to earth and fulfilling His eternal plan. Paul explains this in Galatians chapter 4. Beginning verse 1, he writes: "Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the

time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.”

Here, Paul refers to God’s people before the coming of the Christ when they were under the law with its sacrifices and ceremonies. He likens them to ‘children’ who must be led and guided until they are brought to maturity. God’s people before the advent of Christ were ‘children’ spiritually speaking. The Law of Moses was given to guard and guide them until they came of age. The old law was elementary in their spiritual development until they were ready for the Christ to be revealed. So, the old law was given by God for a limited purpose and when that purpose was fulfilled, it could then be taken out of the way. Paul says that a child is under guardians and stewards (or managers) until “the time (or date) set by the father.” That is, at the time a father thinks the child is ready, then those elementary and preparatory things are taken out of the way. That’s how it was with God and the Old Testament Jews. He then says: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” When the time was right or when the time which the Father set had come, He sent forth His Son, who was born a Jew living under the law, but who then fulfilled and took that law away as He brought them to maturity (that’s what the term ‘adoption’ refers to in this context). It was not an accident that Jesus was born when He was. It was at precisely the time the Father set and He set that time for good reason as is the case with anything that God does.

Now, we really don’t know when Jesus was born. Scholars don’t even agree upon the year, much less the exact time of year or actual day of His birth. It is very unlikely that Jesus was born on December 25th or even during that time of year. The bible doesn’t tell us when He was born, nor does it make any mention of celebrating His birth on a particular day of the year. The church had been in existence for 300 years before Catholic Pope Julius I decided that December 25 was the day of Christ’s birth in 336 AD. The day was not celebrated until nearly 15 years later under the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine and wasn’t declared an official celebration until 200 years after that. The bible says nothing about celebrating Christ’s birth in December or at any other time. Such is purely a human idea and springs from human tradition.

What we do know is that Christ Jesus **was** born, and we should be thankful and rejoice every day over that wonderful fact. No matter the day or month when Jesus was born or even the exact year: He came at exactly the right time that God decreed. Paul says “in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” Please note the bible’s wording: “God SENT FORTH His Son.” In other words, Jesus existed before His birth. He was not a created being. He was not born as any other man. He was one of the Godhead Three whom God, the Father sent forth to become a man by being born of woman. His conception was a miracle. Mary was a virgin. The bible affirms this in the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Spirit miraculously caused Mary to conceive (not in the normal way a child is conceived) and through the portal of her womb, God, the Son, entered time and space and became part of His creation. Paul says this occurred in ‘the fullness of time’. I want to consider with you why the timing of the birth of Christ was such an amazing and providentially engineered event. He truly could not have come to the world at a better time and there are several things that point to that.

First and most important, Jesus was born in the fullness of time PROPHETICALLY. His birth fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies written hundreds of years before in ways that are far beyond the possibility of it being coincidence. In fact, fulfilled prophecy is perhaps the most compelling evidence of the bible’s divine inspiration! There are dozens of direct prophecies recorded in the Old Testament about Jesus, the promised Messiah, and hundreds of allusions, symbols, and prophetic portraits of Him

throughout the old scriptures. These prophecies did more than predict that a Messiah would one day come, and they did more than tell of WHY He would come. They showed HOW He would come – and when – and where He would come. Take for example the prophet Micah. More than 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Micah wrote in Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." That was 740 years before Jesus made His lowly entrance in Bethlehem. That would be like someone in the 1300's predicting when the next president of the United States would be born. And yet, 700 years after Micah wrote those words, hundreds of miles away in Rome, Caesar Augustus decided a census needed to be taken. The emperor had no idea who Joseph was or that his decree would cause this Jewish peasant to have to travel down to a tiny little town in Bethlehem and one of the Jews' prophecies would be fulfilled. We can trace the lineage of Jesus from Genesis to the gospels and we can trace the path laid out by the prophets concerning first, which seed line (Seth); then which family He would come from; Abraham; then which nation (the Jews); then which tribe (Judah – the tribe of the kings); all the way down to the home into which He would be born and the mother in whose arms He would be placed – Mary. So many of the events of the Old Testament happened and are recorded to show us how God orchestrated the birth of His Son into this human world and died on the cross, fulfilling God's plan. Yes, every detail of Jesus' birth was planned and anticipated by God all down the stream of time until the exact moment He appears. He came in the fullness of time PROPHETICALLY.

And then, Jesus came in the fullness of time POLITICALLY. This was very important. Jesus was born into a world ruled by the Romans and that was the perfect political environment, believe it or not. One of the most interesting studies is of the intertestamental period or what we sometimes call the 400 silent years between the last Old Testament prophet and the birth of Jesus. We have no biblical record of that period. God was not speaking to man at that time. We rely primarily upon uninspired apocryphal books to give us the world history of that time. And what we learn is that a succession of empires arose and subjugated the Jews until finally Rome conquered and took over before the birth of Christ. Now, granted, the Romans did not have any interest in the Jewish religion or in the new religion of Christianity when it first arose. They were interested in keeping the peace and keeping the Jews and all other regions they controlled under their thumb and paying their taxes. But there was a benefit to the rule of Rome – a great benefit, in fact. Despite the power and fierceness of the emperors and the Roman armies, they did keep the world at peace. Oh, there were little skirmishes and insignificant wars that arose from time to time, but the world when Jesus was born was by and large and peaceful and relatively safe world.

It was also an advancing world. Alexander the Great had paved the way with his conquests for great world achievement and with Rome now in control, the world was developing. For example, the Romans built one of the greatest road systems of the ancient world. In fact, some of the roads they constructed 2,000 years ago are still in use today! What does that have to do with anything? It eventually facilitated the spread of the gospel of Christ to the entire Greek world. God had a covenant with and worked through the Jewish nation all through the Old Testament dispensation, but His plan was for the kingdom of Christ to sweep over the globe. It began in Jerusalem in the early first century, but it didn't stay contained there for long. The apostles and those they converted fanned out over the known world in the first century and spread the gospel and enlarged the borders of Christ's kingdom from the east to the west and the north to the south. Had events not happened as they did, and Rome had not been in control of the world in that era, Christianity likely would have remained a small and non-influential movement confined to the small area of Palestine. But the advances of the world under the Romans and

the Hellenization of the Jews throughout the Roman empire, allowed the gospel to quickly spread like wildfire and sweep across the world and to largely do so unhindered.

Jesus also came in the fullness of the time **CULTURALLY**. The world became more uniform and unified during the period leading up to the birth of Christ. As the empire spread, for example, a common and near-universal language was in use throughout the world – Koine Greek. This ancient Greek was the language of the common people, and it was used everywhere. The apostles were Hebrews, but they were able to easily preach and write the gospel in a language that people throughout the world could understand. I even pointed out in another program recently that Koine Greek was a language unique to that age and is not a modern, changing language. This allowed the everlasting gospel to be written down using words that not only could be understood then but that have not changed in their meaning and mean the same thing today, unlike our modern languages that continue to evolve with the passing of time. Not only that, but the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures had also been translated into Greek and was called the Septuagint. It was the translation Jesus often used and quoted from. By the time of Christ's birth, the Jews had become dispersed and Hellenized until many of them spoke Greek instead of Hebrew and so, not only did they have access to the Old Testament scriptures which pointed forward to Jesus – they could also have the apostles' writings – the New Testament – pointing back to and explaining Jesus' fulfillment of them. Thanks to the culture of that time, men could hear, read, and understand the word and will of God and its meaning could be preserved for the many ages to come, even our own.

Finally, Jesus came at the right time **SPIRITUALLY**. Now, spiritually, the world was in a dark place. The Greek world was saturated with idolatry and paganism and the Jewish world was far adrift from the actual law of God and hard of heart. That's why John the Immerser was sent before Christ, so that he could call the people to repentance and prepare the way for the announcement of the Messiah. Like a farmer goes into a neglected field and plows it up and gets it ready for the sowing of seed, so John came to the Jews to prepare the way for the Lord. The gospel of John so beautifully calls Jesus a light that came into the world. In the prologue of his gospel in John 1:9 he says that Christ was "...the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." Well, the darker the room, brighter seems the light. Jesus came unto His own people and even though the religious leaders of His day were blind and rejected Him, the common people had a yearning in their heart for something better. After a 400-year dearth of hearing from God, they were ready for some revelation from heaven. They were ready for a revival of their faith and for hope to finally appear. The bible tells us that as Jesus preached and taught, "the common people heard Him gladly." They came to Him, the healer, the man who spoke of salvation from sin and hope in their hopeless lives. And it was the poor in spirit and humble of heart that provided the great foundation for the gospel and the catalyst for Christ's message and the establishment of the church of Christ.

And even in the Greek world, Christ came in the fullness of time. That may seem strange to say for the Gentiles were polytheistic idol worshippers. They didn't know anything about the true and living God of heaven. They worshipped statues and carvings and images of their own hands. There were more gods before them than you nearly could count. You remember Paul and what he encountered in Athens in Acts 17. But think about it this way. There was a religious tolerance, you see, that allowed an opportunity for the message of Christianity to be heard. It at least gave the apostles a platform and an audience to introduce the Greek world to a God whom they knew nothing about. And consequently, the church may have begun in a mighty way among the Jewish people in Acts 1-9, but it flourished and spread across the continents when it reached the curious ears of the Roman world. God can use a dark situation to shine His light in an incredibly powerful way. There are many moral and religious doctrines

and philosophies that I staunchly stand against and fiercely disagree with because they're wrong. I and others preach in an effort to turn people away from error and you to the truth. But I'm thankful for the freedom of speech and religion that we enjoy in America today, not because I rejoice in false doctrines and error being spoken but because it gives the TRUTH the opportunity to be laid alongside it and be heard. Such a condition existed in the day Jesus came.

Yes indeed, my friend, Jesus came in the fullness of time. He came at the right time, at the right place, in the right way, to the right world for His kingdom to be planted in this world and eventually girdle the globe. And friend, Jesus has come in the fullness of time for you. He was born, He lived, He died... and He arose for YOU. You, in your sins and trespasses. You in your lostness and hopelessness; He has come to you and FOR you and He wants to be your Savior, your Lord, and your King. Will you receive Him by humbly believing Him and submitting to His will in obedience? Repent of your sins, confess His name today, and be buried with Him in baptism that your sins might be washed away.

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