"IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME…"

Presented by

Justin Schumacher

In the New Testament book of Galatians there is a fascinating statement about Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, "**But when the fullness of the time had come**, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). We recognize, of course, that Jesus is God's Son, and as Matthew 1:21 tells us, that He came "to save His people from their sins." But what did Paul mean when he said that God sent Jesus "when the fullness of time had come"?

Even though Paul did not explain his statement any further, it is clear from this amazing passage that the timing of Christ's arrival on Earth was not something that happened merely by chance. God sent Jesus to the Earth according to a precise, heavenly designed plan. God knew when the time was right for His Son to make His appearance on Earth. And, as we look back through history, we can see several things that might have made it the perfect time for Christ to come.

First, after Alexander the Great conquered the then-known world, the Greek language dominated not only the Mediterranean region but many far-away regions as well. Almost everyone knew Greek, and could speak it, write it, or both—which made communication among people much easier. Second, the Roman Empire had spread far and wide, taking with it a universal system of justice and peace known as the *pax Romana*—which is the Latin phrase meaning the "peace of Rome." Third, thanks to the existence of a common language, and a single ruling Empire, travel over great distances had become much easier and more common. Fourth, Jewish prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others had spent hundreds of years telling people that a Savior was coming. And the people certainly **needed** a Savior because they were spiritually sick. For example, the Sadducees, a specific group of the Jews, had even come to the point where they did not believe in life after death! Fifth, the Jews had spread out widely into many different lands, taking with them their laws and customs. They had built synagogues, which not only were places of worship, but also were popular spots for people to gather to discuss important issues of the day. Sixth, the Old Testament Scriptures, which originally had been written in Aramaic and Hebrew, had been translated into Greek in a book known as the Septuagint, and were being circulated widely.

There may have been other reasons why it was a good time for Christ to come to Earth. But there is something else of importance that must be considered when trying to explain why Christ arrived exactly when He did. Hundreds of years earlier, in Genesis 49:10, Moses had given a very specific prophecy that said, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes." Examine with me for a few moments the content of this extremely important verse.

The word "Shiloh" was recognized by the Jews as being another name for the Messiah, Whom God had promised to send at some point in the future. This verse, as it turns out, explains exactly **when** the Messiah was to come—**when the scepter had departed from Judah**. But what was the "scepter," and when did it depart from Judah? The scepter was a staff kept in the possession of the elders of each of the twelve tribes of Israel that symbolized the authority of those elders. As long as the elders had the scepter, the Jews not only could govern themselves, but also could even administer the death penalty if necessary.

According to Moses' prophecy, Christ was destined to come **before** the scepter departed from Judah, which meant that Christ would arrive prior to the Jews losing their national rights and powers. So when did the Jews lose those rights and powers? Here is the answer. In A.D. 6, when a man by the name of Coponius was installed by the Roman emperor as the first procurator of Judea, he took away the Jews' power to administer the death penalty. As you may recall from Scripture, when the Jews wanted to put Jesus to death, they were unable to do so. Instead they had to ask Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, to kill Jesus on their behalf. At that very moment the Jews should have realized that the Messiah already was in their midst because Moses' prophecy had predicted that He would be among them "**before** the scepter had departed from Judah." One Jewish teacher by name of Rabbi Rachmon said, "When the Jews found themselves deprived of their right over life and death…they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming, 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come.' "

The Jews were right about one thing: the scepter **had** departed from Judah. Yet those Jews ignored Moses' prophecy in Genesis 49:10, and as a result they were wrong in saying that the Messiah **had not yet come**. **He *had* come**—just as God had promised, and just as Paul explained when he wrote in Galatians 4:4 that, "in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son….."

It had been a long time since God had said in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." God had given man rules, regulations, and laws to help make his life better and to help him get to heaven. God had been patient as He watched and waited. And, along the way, God had given mankind marvelous gifts such as miracles, prophets, and divine revelations. But He had saved the best gift of all—Jesus Christ—for "the fullness of time." Jesus Himself said in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

Jesus came to a world where "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But He said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), and He offered mankind "the free gift of God, which is eternal life" (Romans 6:23).

Today if you are not a Christian, you have no more hope of going to heaven than the Jews of the first century who refused to believe in Jesus as God's Son. As a result of their stubborn unbelief, they will not be in heaven. But **their** fate does not have to be **your** fate. If you are not a Christian, you can become one

by doing what the Bible tells you to do. John 3:16 says that you must believe that Jesus is God's Son. Luke 13:3 says that you must repent of your sins. Romans 10:10 says that you must confess Christ as Lord. And Acts 2:38 says that you must be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Or, if you are already a Christian whose faith has faltered, yet you still want to go to heaven, we would like to help you reach that goal by praying for you so that you can be forgiven of any sin in your life. If there is any way we can assist you, please let us know as we stand and sing.