



Right Place at the Right Time

WEEK TWO: IN THE FULNESS OF TIME

“But when the time had been fulfilled God sent his Son”

Galatians 4:4

Between the Old Testament and the New Testament there were 400 years of silence: the voice of prophecy ceased and it seemed almost as if God was doing nothing except waiting for the right time to fulfil the Old Testament Messianic Prophecies. In the very first of these prophecies judgment was pronounced over satan : that the offspring of Eve would strike satan’s head (Genesis 3;15). Before we look at these years of apparent inactivity, we might like to indulge in a little speculation. When, for example, did satan expect his

judgment to fall and his captives set free. He certainly knew of the voice of the prophets and would have paid close attention to those which came from God (the others would have been in his pocket!!). I think that just maybe satan was fooled with these years of prophetic silence, just as we might be ourselves. It is just possible that the alarm button in hell only rang with the visit of the Wise Men to King Herod asking him *“where is he who is has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star and have come to worship him”* Matthew 2:3. Certainly, the fingerprint of satan could be seen behind the massacre of all male children under two years old (Matthew 2:16).

So much for speculation: we turn now to examine in detail what was happening during these 400 years of prophetic silence (between the completion of the Old Testament and, as we shall see, the events which would bring into being the New Testament). We find independent witness to this prophetic silence in the Apocrypha: *“So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.”* *1 Maccabees 9:27*. The most obvious conclusion to make about this silence is that God had said everything He needed to say about the coming Messiah, until that glorious event occurred.

However, it would be a big mistake to assume that God was inactive during this period; just as a pregnant mother makes careful preparations for the arrival of a baby, so will find God moving significantly and powerfully among the nations. In Daniel ch.7, Daniel receives a vision of four nations: 1) Babylon (v.4) represented as a lion, 2) Medes and Persians (v.5) a bear, 3) Greece under Alexander the Great (v.6) a leopard, and 4) Rome (v.7) a terrifying, dreadful and very strong beast with iron teeth. The last two are particularly significant because they demonstrate not only kingdoms which will affect Israel, but kingdoms which will prepare the way for the Gospel to reach the world. Powerful nations which do not really acknowledge God, but note who is really in charge of them: God!!!

Let's look first at this strange leopard with wings (have you ever seen one of them in a zoo?). This describes the amazing impetuous advance of the young Alexander the Great through Asia; in a short space of time he won incomparable victories at the banks of the River Granicus in Turkey (334 BC); at Issus in Cilicia (not far from Tarsus) in 333BC; at Gaugamela near Nineveh (331BC). At Gaugamela he defeated a Persian army 20 times as large (Daniel 8:7; *"in the ram (Persia) there was no strength to stand before him, and he threw them to the ground and trampled upon him and no one saved the ram out of his hand."* Alexander's victories didn't take God by surprise:

He described them in advance! However, at the height of his power, Alexander died at the age of 32 (323BC). Alexander and his successors established Greek style cities as far east as the Indus valley and as far north as the former central Asian states of the Soviet Union. Alexander's main plan was not simply to conquer east and west in a political or military sense, but to weld them culturally and to unite them into a single nation. The major thing to notice is that the consequence of all that was to make the common language of international intercourse Greek (known as "koine", the "common speech"). Jews in Alexandria translated their Hebrew bible into Greek so as to understand it!! Oops forgot the Hebrew, lads? Not so far into the future, Christian missionaries just had to learn one new language to be understood wherever they went (by reliable tradition, Thomas is thought to have reached India). If not him, then by one of his disciples!

The last piece of the jigsaw falls into place with the fourth beast : the Romans. At the time of the foundation of the Persian empire Rome was but a tiny town in mid-Italy, which the Greek historian Herodotus doesn't even mention; however by the time of Jesus Rome was the meeting place of the world. Its straight roads (all roads lead to Rome!) went to the furthest corners of the vast Roman Empire; roads which could be safely travelled because of the "Pax Romana",

Roman law and order, backed by Roman legions. The Romans, a Western Empire began to look East and entered on the back of Alexander's inheritance, by making Greece, modern Yugoslavia (Illyria), and Asia Minor (as far as the Taurus Mountains) and Palestine Roman Provinces. However, the really strange thing is that they never set the policy of "Romanizing" in the foreground of their civilizing activity, but everywhere continued the Hellenizing of the world.¹ The final battle began with Caesar Augustus (of Luke 2:1 fame) with the defeat of Antony and the suicide of Cleopatra. Egypt was now a Roman province and Rome was master of the Mediterranean. It was Caesar Augustus who made St. Paul's missionary journeys possible: by stamping out piracy in the Mediterranean. Note that Paul's missionary strategy was to plant churches in important seaports and train them up to evangelize the hinterland! Oh, and there was one final finishing touch : the expanding Roman empire saw the collapse of the old Roman religion of hearth and home; men now searched for a religion that would deliver them from the evils of this world and would provide a promise of new life in the next. There were many mystery cults set up to exploit that need, but only Christianity (no mystery cult) could deliver the goods. Cults were all show and no reality; Christianity alone changes the heart!

¹ The Dawn of World Redemption, Erich Sauer p.176

God suddenly speaks: Luke 1:1-28

The end of God's silence: God sends an angel of the Lord to speak to Zechariah. As with Sarah, Elizabeth, in old age, is going to have a baby: John the Baptist, the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. Zechariah is struck dumb, not with the angel's message, so much as with the "impossibility" of Elizabeth to conceive!

- **Note the simple description of Zechariah as a priest of the order of Abijah. That places him in the temple at the end of April and the beginning of May.**
- **Now notice that Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive Jesus.**
- **Do the maths: Mary conceived in December, which means that Jesus was born in Sept/Oct, the time of the Feast of the Tabernacles (a traditional time for the Messiah to be born)**
- **The year? 6 or 5 BC; Herod who sought to kill all babies two or under died in 4BC!**
- **AD was devised by the monk, Dionysius Exiguus in 525. He got his sums slightly wrong!!**