

THE FULLNESS OF TIME

By

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The appearance of Jesus is easily the central event in the history of mankind as is attested by the dating of all events as either BC or AD. All time is measured by the entrance of the eternal into its obtunds. Most significant in this regard is the ending of one age and the beginning of another, in which we now live.

Jesus begin His ministry with these startling words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The Jewish leaders understood exactly what He meant, that their regime was coming to an end, and early on set out to destroy the One who stated it.

In the midst of Paul’s great argument that the Old Covenant (which he termed “the law”) is no longer in effect, he stated: “When the fullness of the time came God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” (Gal. 4:4. This “fullness of time” had nothing to do with conditions among nations (the Gentiles), with their politics, their wars and economic problems. It had everything to do with the nation of Israel and the covenant God had with them. The ancient nation was to be no more. God had been faithful to hem, but they had failed to keep covenant with Him and, according to His promise, they were to be cast out.

“Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mt. 21:43). To make sure they understood this to refer to a complete end of the then existing religious economy, He pointed out that the temple, the center of their nationhood and religion, was to be destroyed totally and that judgment was to fall upon that generation. “And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said, ‘As for these things which you behold, the day will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another.’” (Luke 21:5–6, Cf. Luke 21:20–24). The time of the special privileges, special protection, special blessings, special homeland and special relationship with God for the 12 tribes had been fulfilled (CF. Rom. 9:4–5).

It was the fullness of time for the Old Covenant. Jeremiah had promised a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). Moses, at the inauguration of the Old Covenant, said that it was limited in time. “The Lord your God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto him shall you hearken” (Deut. 18:15). Peter said that this prophet was Jesus (Acts 3:23). The Old Covenant had given way to the New Covenant established through Christ, who had symbolized His death in the bread and cup of the last supper, saying, “This is the new covenant in my blood” (Mt. 26:28).

The Old Covenant was kept in force continually by the blood of the sacrifice applied to the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. At Christ’s death this veil was torn away by divine power, signaling the end of both sacrifice and covenant.

The covenant with Abraham was a covenant of promise, promising the coming of the “seed” through which all nations were to be blessed (Gen. 12:3 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). That seed was Christ (Gal. 3:16, and through the atonement attained by His death and resurrection all nations have been blessed indeed. The Old Covenant was “added”

explained Paul, because of their transgressions (Gal. 3:19). It was to be in force until the seek (Christ) should come. It was parenthetical, and never intended to be perpetual. It was typical foreshadowing the eternal things that were to come through Christ.

The Old Covenant required a high Priest and daily sacrifices and offerings. The priest had to be replaced from time-to-time, as they grew old and died. In Hebrews it is explained that we now have a High Priest who does not need to be replaced, for He is Christ, who is immortal (Heb. 7:23–24). The rites of blood sacrifices ended as Christ became the fulfillment of all such sacrifices.

“In which will we have to be sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10). Christ was both Priest and Sacrifice. “For such a high priest became us...who needs not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people; for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself” (Heb. 7:26–27).

Those who want to make Judaism and the atheist state of Israel the focus of God’s concern are doing so at the price of debasing the work of Christ in establishing His new covenant, His church and His own Priesthood and reign (Mt. 5:33–34, 38–39, 43–44, 9:16–17, Luke 16:16, John 1:17, Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:19, 25, 4:4–5, 31, Heb. 7:11–12, 18–19, 22, 8:6–8, 13).

It was the fullness of time for the racial privileges of the seed of Jacob. Paul writes that once there was a separation between nations (Gentiles) and the commonwealth of Israel, “But now in Christ Jesus you that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ, for he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances...” And now all the household is one, “being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:14–20).

Therefore, under the New Covenant national distinctions are wiped out completely. “for as many of you as were immersed (baptized) into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for you all are one man in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:27–29).

There is nothing special for the Jew in the future outside of Jesus Christ. Peter said it long ago, when certain Jews wanted to impose the old law upon some new Gentile converts. “We believe that we (of the 12 tribes) shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they” (Acts 15:11).

The last commission of Christ to make disciples in all nations offers salvation to the Jew on the same terms that it does to the Gentile, and there is no special deal offered, now or in the future, to either one.

The purpose of God is not one thing for the 12 tribes and another for all the rest of the nations. All are to be saved the same way; all have the same hope of a future immortal life; and all have the same prospect of the “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.” This is to come after the destruction of the present earth (II Peter 3:10–13).

The fullness of time was the fulfillment of prophecy and therefore the present land of Palestine over which the Jews have persecuted the Arabs has nothing to do with the fulfillment of God’s promises. To apply Old Testament prophecies to modern Israel

and Lebanon requires a monstrous perversion of Biblical exegesis which is allowed nowhere else by Bible scholars.

The fullness of time meant the final appearance of the long-awaited Messiah, Not Messiah for Israel only, but the “desire of the nations,” the blessing of all peoples through the seed of Abraham.

The fourteen hundred year-old nation of Israel ended with the coming of Christ and His death, resurrection and ascension. It was the fullness of time for God’s special nation through which He revealed to the world His law and through which He produced the Savior. It was the beginning of the “last days” and the end of the ages. It was the beginning of the “time of the Gentiles” and God’s blessing to all families of the earth through the Gospel.

That time also is limited; “until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in” (Rom. 11:25), and it will end with the coming of Christ for the second time. As He came in judgment upon Israel, Christ will come again in judgment upon the nations who have refused to hear Him and have defiled the blessed privileges He has given.

For many people these are days of tension, with that tension growing tighter daily as they wait for some ominous even to happen. Speculations based on Old Testament prophecies with regard to Israel keep winding that tension tighter and tighter, as people wait for the fulfillment of some prophecy which will never occur, because it is already fulfilled. “There are no unfulfilled prophecies concerning Christ or Israel which are not comprehended in the New Covenant” (George B. Fletcher).

We now live in the last days, a time for evangelism and service. The Good News is still news to most in the world who do not know the meaning of Christ’s death nor the hope of being raised up to live as deathless and glorious creatures in the image of God. We are to “occupy” until He comes. That means we are to hold forth to all the world the light of truth He gave at His first coming to prepare people for His return and judgment. This age will give way to eternity. Now is the day of salvation!

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