

God Selected the Best Time

by Bill Crews

Galatians 4:4 reads, *“But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”* When did Jesus, the Word of John 1:1-18, *“become flesh”* (Jn. 1:14)? When did deity come to this earth as a human? *“When the fulness of the time came,”* when the time was ripe, at the best possible time, when all of the beneficial and favoring circumstances were present or in place. We can surely identify some of those.

Though not a free and independent nation, there were still many Jews concentrated in their original homeland of Palestine, especially in Judea and Galilee, and even across the Jordan river in Perea and Bashan. They possessed their genealogies and could trace their ancestry, even Joseph and Mary of Nazareth in Galilee. There were many Jewish synagogues and numerous copies of the Old Testament scriptures. Many of the Jews were familiar with the contents of those scriptures and were expecting the coming Messiah (though their concept of Him and His kingdom was more carnal than spiritual). There were not a few who sincerely sought to live by those scriptures. There were many who could be made ready for the Lord by a prophet such as John the Baptist who called on them to repent of their sins, to be baptized in water for the remission of those sins, and to believe on Him who was to come (Matt. 3:1-2; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; 7:30; Acts 19:4). Many things that served as types, copies, shadows, figures (see the book of Hebrews) of all the better things that were to come through Christ were still in place: the holy city, Jerusalem; God’s house, the temple at Jerusalem; the law of Moses, a temporal covenant; the ceremonies, services, and sacrifices of that law. The Jews had finally laid aside pagan idolatry, which they had pursued throughout their history in the Old Testament. The gospel of salvation would first be preached to them, beginning in the city of Jerusalem.

Through conquest and captivity, through deportations, through political turmoil and religious persecutions, through commercial ventures and opportunities, through the providence of God Jews had been scattered among many nations (see Acts 2:5-11). They were the Jews of *“The Dispersion”* (Ho Diaspora in Greek). Some of these attended religious feasts of the law of Moses at the temple in Jerusalem. More of them had constructed *“synagogues”* in which they assembled on the sabbath to hear their scriptures read and discussed. They too were familiar with the contents of the Old Testament, understood some of the prophecies about the Messiah, and were expecting that Messiah. These pockets of Jews furnished fertile soil for the gospel of Christ. Many would be converted and become nuclei for the spreading of the gospel among Gentiles.

One of the finest and most precise languages in human history, the very language in which God wanted the gospel, the new covenant of Christ, revealed and permanently preserved, the Koine (common) Greek, had become so wide-spread (Alexander the Great had much to do with that) that it was spoken throughout the Roman Empire. Though Latin was the official and formal language of the Roman Empire, the Koine Greek was its spoken language. Many who had other native languages could also understand this language. How much easier and faster this would make it to spread the message of the gospel of Christ.

In the past there were warring kingdoms and closed borders. Or there were fractured and contending remnants of former empires. But when Jesus was born, Augustus Caesar was emperor (he ruled longer than others — from 31 B.C. to 14 A.D. — and was wiser and more tolerant), and the Roman Empire prevailed, ringing the Mediterranean Sea and in some areas stretching far beyond. There was more religious freedom and more religious tolerance than at any time before. There was extensive commerce and freedom of movement. A great system of paved roads was in place, built primarily to accommodate the rapid movement of the Roman military and Roman officials, but also used by merchants, travelers, and the messengers of Jesus with the gospel. Roman roads were at least four layers deep and 26 feet wide with a convex cross-section for water drainage. Wherever Roman legions (divisions of soldiers) went, they laid down roads — until there were 53,638 miles of them, all around the Mediterranean Sea and even to Germany and England. And there were great cities that became centers for the spread of the gospel of Christ — Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, Ephesus in Asia of Asia Minor, Thessalonica in Macedonia, Corinth in Achaia, the capital city of Rome in Italy, and others. Surely, the ministry of Jesus came when *“the fulness of the time came.”*

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