

111211PM WTB-5 Perfect Time.doc

World of the Bible Series: JESUS ARRIVED AT THE PERFECT TIME GALATIANS 4:4-5

In the days of Caesar Augustus, Jesus Christ was born.

Luke 2:1 (NKJV) "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered."

There are two elements to that truth we need to ponder before we go.

First, does it really matter, what day He was born on?

And secondly, why did God pick the time of Augustus Caesar?

First, consider:

The Day Jesus Was Born

While the world promotes the Advent of Santa, and in the backdrop we celebrate the birth of Christ, many ask about how we know that December 25th is the REAL date. Was Jesus really born¹ on December 25th?

To answer the question of Christ's birth, first we must realize that almost every month has been presented and defended for various reasons by Bible Scholars over the ages. My library is filled with conflicting reasoning. So why do we celebrate December 25th?

The date we now call Christmas is the most ancient recorded date that the church has celebrated. In the 2nd century AD we find a Western church leader named Hippolytus, wrote a strong argument for the December 25th date. Theologians and church leaders came to the conclusion that it was actually 11 days later, on the 6th on January. So the window of time we now use has been the season for 19 centuries.

A powerful preaching pastor from Constantinople, who was as well known, loved, and respected as John Piper or John MacArthur are today, wrote in the 4th century taught

¹ Ideas from an article by DTS professor Daniel B. Wallace have greatly helped me with this section.

very clearly and convincingly that December 25th is the date, and both the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Western Roman Catholic Church have agreed upon that date.

One of the arguments about the date surrounds Luke's account that states that an angel appeared to "some shepherds staying out in the fields [who were] keeping watch over their flock by night" (2:8).

The reasoning is that no one would stay out in the fields during the cold and rainy season November to March; and that sheep were brought inside. However, ancient Jewish historians record that the flocks around Jerusalem were for Temple use primarily and the sheep in the area of Bethlehem would have been outside even in December. So the December 25th date would work both historically and culturally.

We do not read that all sheep were kept outside year round. So the sheep at Bethlehem were not typical. But that is true in more ways than one. Sheep that would be the special Passover lambs were very special so the tradition helps point to yet another facet of Christ's coming as the Lamb of God.

What is most amazing from the Christmas story is how the shepherds were first to get the news. They were out of the flow of daily life. Their profession made them perpetually unclean and unfit for Temple entrance. They touched dead animals, and they missed Temple celebrations. Both put them in the Jewish society's list of outcasts.

So think of the picture Luke gives us: men who watched the lambs that would serve as the substitutes for sins, who themselves were far from access to the Temple of God, were invited to first see the One who came to set us free from our sins. What John the Baptist proclaimed when he saw Jesus in John 1:29 was also their privilege: they beheld the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

It is not the Date It was the Reason

There is no date recorded in the Bible. If the date was vital, God would have included it. But to think of dreary, cold, dark nights in the rain when the sky explodes with light and choruses of angels seems to be a beautiful, and very defensible date.

The real culprit is the early church. They did not make shrines out of the tomb, or holy days out of dates. They were so focused upon Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection that to mark just one day as special instead of every day, was foreign to their practice.

It is amazing that while the early church universally gloried in the horrible specter of a bloodied man, who claimed He was God: suffering a cruel death for sin on a Cross. Our modern times finds it far more appealing to universally celebrate a quiet baby. Baby Jesus appears to be less threatening than the man whom He grew into.

The Gospel says we must either accept or reject the complete package of who Christ is and what He said He came to do.

Don't let the date distract from the message of the Cross that is why Christ came at Christmas.

Second, we need to ask ourselves:

Why Does Caesar Augustus Matter?

Everything about the events of Christmas are glorious. We will only look at the element of the timing of Christ's birth right now, but all the other elements are equally rich.

The True Glory of Christmas is how perfectly God entered our world that first Christmas. There are six perfections we will see:

1. His TIMING was perfect because it was in **THE FULLNESS OF TIME.**
2. His NAMES were perfect because they **REVEAL WE DEEPLY NEED WHAT ONLY GOD GIVES.**
3. His PLAN was perfect because it was be **GOD WITH US.**
4. His PROMISES were perfect because they were the **CULMINATION OF ALL PROPHECY.**
5. His RECEPTION was perfect because **HE WAS FOUND BY ALL WHO WERE LOOKING FOR HIM.**

For now, open with me to Galatians 4, and we will read the first five verses.

Galatians 4:1-5 (NKJV) 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, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. 4 **But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son**, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Thus the world that cradled Christ was the world that Christianity entered, and by God's definition was the Fullness of Time: It was characterized by six things:

1. Worldwide Citizenship
2. Worldwide Language
3. Worldwide Transportation
4. Worldwide Peace
5. Worldwide Moral Decline
6. Worldwide Expectancy

In short order, let me demonstrate this:

1ST GOD PICKED A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP & LANGUAGE

Many times as we read Acts we find the Apostle Paul using something: his Roman citizenship. Paul was released from jail, kept from being scourged, and given an opportunity to preach to perhaps the largest crowd of the ancient world as he stood on the steps of the Antonian Fortress in Jerusalem and gave his testimony to 10, 20, 30, maybe even 50 to 75 thousand people or more.

We read in Acts 16:35 of Paul in the prison at Philippi: And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

Why? Paul was far from home, and found his ministry was in dire straits. So he used his rights as a citizen to help the church get started, and be left with credibility at Philippi.

Paul had no real home but heaven. Look with me now at:

Acts 22:22 And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

Though Paul found some ministry benefits to Roman Citizenship, there was a looming danger. Roman citizenship had its price, and that price was the obsession with worship that Emperors seemed to desire more and more.

The empire began to put its emphasis on Emperor² worship. It was the religious expression of the unity of the State which was seen in the empire, especially Caligula (A. D. 37-41) and Domitian (81-96).

Some of the titles, designations, and honors taken by various emperors were:

- ✓ "God and sovereign Savior of human life" (so already Julius Caesar),
- ✓ "God's son" (Augustus),
- ✓ "Lord and God" (Domitian),

² Sauer, p.

- ✓ "High Priest," "Savior of the World" (Augustus, Claudius, Nero),
- ✓ "King of Kings."
- ✓ His decrees were called "gospels" (good news),
- ✓ his letters "sacred writings."
- ✓ His arrival was termed a "parousia" (advent),
- ✓ his visit an "epiphany."

The long-term effect of this growth of the "divine emperor" was a greater and greater danger for those who followed another "King" which was Jesus (Acts 17). The events of the Roman Empire's worship of their Emperor became an illustration among the writing apostles and prophets of the coming Anti-Christ (Rev. 13).

But, the God who works all things together for His good, used the Divine Augustus to make a decree for the whole world to be taxed. That decree made the long before promised birth of the Messiah to take place in the ancestral hometown of David. God uses the wrath of man to praise His Name.

As Micah 5:2 foretold, Luke 2:1-7 illustrates. God wrote the future and uses mankind to fulfill by their own volitional choices. God orchestrates, guides, and always accomplished His purposes.

2nd God picked a time when There was Global Language

At the birth of Christ, through the conquests of Alexander in the 4th century BC, and the conquest of Greece by the Romans: Greek language and culture spread from India to Britain.

Greek became the common language that made Empire wide trade and communication possible. Because of the language barriers being broken, in one generation the world was reached with the Gospel of the Cross of Christ.

The language of the world was in place. So the good news about the sacrificial death of Jesus was quickly understood.

3RD GOD PICKED A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GLOBAL ACCESS

In the market place of every city there stood a milestone giving the distance from Rome.

In the market of "Rome the eternal" there stood a golden milestone, erected by Augustus, which described the capital city as the heart of this giant, pulsating organism of peoples.

- ✓ Between Alexandria and Asia Minor there was a daily shipping connection (Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches, 18, 435).
- ✓ According to Pliny one traveled from Spain to Ostia, the port of Rome, in four days, and in two days from Africa.
- ✓ The tomb inscription is known of a Phrygian merchant who not less than 72 times made the journey from Hierapolis, near Colosse in Asia Minor, to Rome, over 1,250 miles.

Without this notable world traffic the swift advance of early Christianity would have been inconceivable. Sea traffic was specially important to them, for early Christian gospel work was specially important to them, for early Christian gospel work was in great measure a labor in harbor cities, and especially so with Paul.

“All roads lead to Rome.” On these imperial and main roads the messengers of the gospel later traveled, bringing to the world the joyful news of the Redeemer who had appeared.

Some estimate Paul alone journeyed by land and water a total of more than 15,000 miles. (Erich Sauer)

4TH GOD PICKED A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GLOBAL PEACE

Just as the Gospel flourished in Judea after Saul the persecutor was saved and left for Tarsus, so the Gospel spread faster in a world not at war.

There set in the much lauded “Roman Peace,” *Pax Romana*. Although the period of Augustus was not entirely free from war, yet nevertheless at last the temple of Janus at Rome, the temple of the god of war, after over 200 years of uninterrupted fighting (since 236) could at length be shut, in the year 29 B. C.

And for two centuries, until A. D. 180, the world lay in peace. (Erich Sauer)

5TH GOD PICKED A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GLOBAL DEGENERATION

But morally this whole civilized world carried within itself the germ of death.

The streams of gold which, especially since the victory over Hannibal (202 B. C.), flowed into the world’s capital led to such luxury that filth and vulgarity soon lifted their heads in the most insolent manner.

According to the descriptions of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal, we cannot portray with adequate blackness the low moral state to which the aristocracy and highest State officials had sunk.

Debauchery and gluttony, subornation and poisoning, vulgarity and immorality, unchastity and licentiousness were the order of the day, especially in the middle of the first century. The lowest classes had sunken equally low. In the large Hellenistic cities, especially of Italy, lack of work ruined the masses. "*Panem et circenses*" – "Bread and Games" – this was their demand to the rulers.

By day they loitered idly around; in the evening they went to the amphitheatre, the disgusting pleasure resort of Roman brutality. So vast were the crowds that pressed to the wild beast hunts, the gladiatorial contests, and the mimic sea battles, that the Emperor Vespasian and Titus caused to be built in Rome the vast Flavian amphitheater, which had 54,000 seats, and at the dedication of which, in spectacles lasting 120 days, not less than 12,000 beasts and 10,000 gladiators lost their lives. It was otherwise with the middle class. Here the papyri witness that there were still much decorum and morality, private family life, and strong religious feeling. Faith in the gods of Greece and the Italian deities was indeed gone, on which account the mass of the people turned to the oriental deities from the remote East, which, in large numbers, were gaining ground at that time.

In fact, Romans 1:28-32 may be Paul looking out window. But finally, there was one more notable feature of those full times. (Erich Sauer)

6TH GOD PICKED A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GLOBAL EXPECTANCY

Out of Egypt, Persia, Babylon and Asia Minor flowed the rivers of human religions and mystery God's. The "Fullness of Time" was also a time of great religious expectancy:

For so long man had focused on outward power, wealth, architecture, religion. But in the end each found he was inwardly bankrupt. Thus came the praise of death and the other side – when the body or prison of soul opened to let the "birthday of eternity."

Thus, the World Law and Language combine with Communication/Peace and out of blackest moral decline is a strange expectancy that as the night is conquered by the light, so.....can we?

Until at last, coming from the East, from the rising of the sun, from the mouth of simple witnesses, becoming ever stronger and stronger, there rings the world-conquering proclamation:

CHRIST –
THE ATONER FOR MANKIND,
THE SAVIOR OF ALL SINNERS,
THE ONE CONSCIOUSLY EXPECTED BY ISRAEL,
THE ONE UNCONSCIOUSLY DESIRED BY THE
PEOPLES OF THE WORLD:
He has come!

(Erich Sauer)

Galatians 4:4-5 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.

Luke 1:78-79 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

God picked a time when there was global readiness and at that moment – CHRIST APPEARED!

Making Christmas Christ Centered

"This Christmas season, take a close look at a nativity scene once again. Remove your rose-colored glasses--smell the *foul* air, see the cold, shivering animals.

They represent the Old Testament sacrificial system. They are emblems of *death*. But they are mere shadows of the Babe in their midst. He was born to die: that all who believe in him might live.

In the winter of 5 or 4 B.C., God invaded history by taking on the form of a man.

He was born in a small town just south of Jerusalem.

Bethlehem, which means 'the house of bread,' indeed became worthy of its name one lonely winter night. For there, in that town, was born the Bread of Life.

His mother placed the infant king in a manger (or feeding trough) because the guest room where they were to stay was occupied.

The birth of this king was celebrated that night only by his mother, her husband, and a handful of shepherds.

The shepherds had been in the fields around Bethlehem, guarding the lambs which would die at the next Passover.

An angel appeared to them and gave them the birth announcement: "today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

In their simple faith, they rushed to see their newborn King.³

That is the message we herald to our generation. Jesus was a lamb like those many He was born near, so that He could grow up and be THE Lamb of God that can take away the sin of any person in the world that would simply put their trust in Him.

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