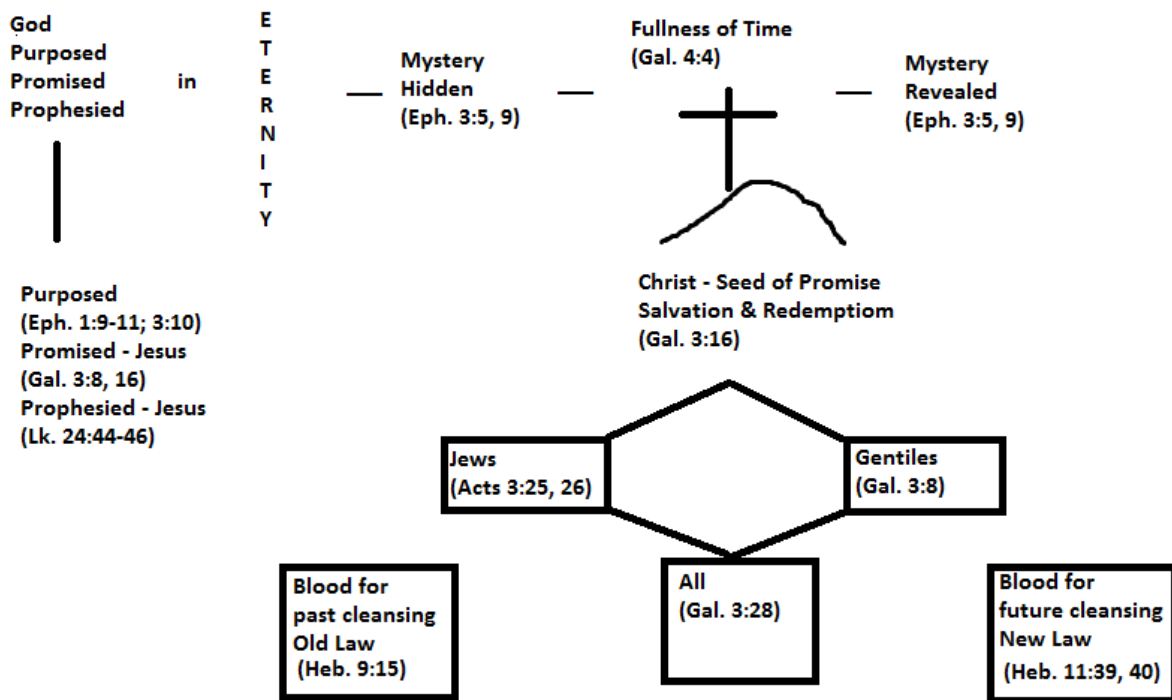


The Fullness of Time

By Al Felder

“¹Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; ²But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. ³Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: ⁴But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the redemption of sons. ⁶And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:1-6)



Before the very foundation of the world, God had a plan. *“¹⁰To the intent that now unto the principalities and power in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Ephesians 3:10, 11) He had a plan through which He would save those who obey Him. In this plan, God designed the church as the body of Christ to which all of the redeemed would belong. *“Praising God, and having favor with the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (Acts 2:47) It is the church that Jesus purchased with His blood. *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* (Acts

20:28) If you want to be made right with God, you must be a part of the body for which He died and purchased with His blood.

Our main concern at this time, however, is the fullness of time stated in our opening text. This was the designated time in which God would bring His marvelous plan of redemption to fruition. It was the time that had been appointed before the very foundation of the world was laid.

In our opening text, Paul refers to the time period before the cross as a childhood. It was a time in which man was under a tutor or governor. The Apostle was making reference to one of the customs of the day in order to illustrate what God was doing throughout the ages to bring mankind to this point.

During the New Testament days, a governor was given charge over a child. The child was like a slave with its every action being ordered by the governor. The child only had the freedom to do what the governor allowed him to do. The governor trained the child for adulthood. Then, once the training was over, the child was free from his governor.

Like that of a child, the world of mankind had to pass through stages of development. The world had its infancy, childhood, and adolescence before it attained maturity. Just as parents must accommodate their instruction, training, and discipline to the developmental state of their children; God had to adjust His requirements to the conditions of mankind in progressive phases.

A realization of this fact leads us to certain inevitable conclusions. Things that might have been condoned in one age could not be continued in another. We smile at the antics of a little child, but realize that the same behavior by an adult would be an occasion of regret and reproof. This principle of human responsibility was stated by the Apostle Paul to the Athenian philosophers. *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”* (Acts 17:30) The unmistakable message from this verse is that God does not tolerate certain behaviors from man that He once tolerated. Mankind has moved into a new stage of development that comes with more accountability.

In His dealings with Abraham, God was trying to impress upon Abraham that He was blessing Abraham and his descendants for a higher purpose. Everything that God did in regards to Abraham and his descendants was for the purpose of bringing about His ultimate plan. God constantly reminded Abraham and his descendants that He was talking to them for their benefit as well as the benefit of all mankind.

The animal sacrifices that were required under the Law of Moses taught those under the Law that God was just and merciful.

“¹And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ²Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: ³If the priest that is anointed do sin

according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering. ⁴And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the Lord.” (Leviticus 4:1-4)

In following the commands of the Law, the one guilty of sin would bring a young bull to the door of the tabernacle. Then, he would place his hand upon the young bull's head as it was being slain. Through this process it became clear to the person that an innocent animal was dying in his place for his sin. It was clear that God's justice demanded payment for sin, but that His mercy accepted a substitute. Thus, the law prepared man for the ultimate sacrifice of Christ and taught why it was necessary. *“To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26)* Payment had to be made for sin, and only through the perfect sacrifice of Christ could God make a way for man to be restored unto Him.

The various laws and rituals dealing with cleanness and uncleanness emphasized the holiness of God; that He was one who dwelt apart from all corruption, uncleanness, and sin. God slowly and patiently taught those under the Law the wickedness of sin, and the hopelessness of man apart from the mercy of the substantial sacrifice. Through this God also demonstrated His faithfulness, but it was also necessary for God to demonstrate that man might be faithful too.

“¹³For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, ¹⁴Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. ¹⁵And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. ¹⁷Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: ¹⁸That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” (Hebrews 6:13-18)

In the darkness of his time, in the degeneracy of his day, Abraham was able to honor and obey God in a way and in a manner that was pleasing to Him.

The fullness of time was a time when the partial and temporary forgiveness available under the Law would give way to the fullness of grace in Christ. This was the time in which the mystery of God which had been partially concealed, even from His prophets, would be fully revealed. This was the time when the golden age of the Messiah foreshadowed in the Old Testament would come to fruition.

Christ came at a time that was most conducive to the spreading of the Gospel. *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2:44)* This vision is the first of

many, regarding the kingdoms of man and the kingdom of Christ, recorded in the book of Daniel. In each vision the four great kingdoms of man are mentioned (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome). Daniel explained this vision to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that during the days of the fourth kingdom (Rome), God would establish His kingdom.

During the years following the Babylonian captivity, the Jews began the practice of using synagogues. These synagogues were constructed anywhere that Jews had populated, and they were used by the Apostles for the spreading of the Gospel. *“¹Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ²And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.”* (Acts 17:1, 2) The Medes and the Persians contributed their famous law, which in turn influenced Roman law. Paul was not only protected on a number of occasions by Roman law, it also provided the stability which allowed the Gospel to spread quickly. Greece gave the world a universal language in which the New Testament was written. Rome united the world by building roads and facilitating travel and communication throughout its empire. If Christ had come sooner or later, it would not have been the best time. God, however, sent Him in the fullness of time.