

“WHEN JESUS WAS BORN”

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman,
born under the law, (Galatians 4:4 NKJV)

When Lorraine and I were in Branson, MO this fall, I bought a booklet that tells about 1938, the year I was born. The first Superman comic was published that year. The first passenger liner with radar sailed that year. Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" was broadcast and caused a national scare. Kate Smith introduced the song "God Bless America." The first Xerox copy was made. In L'il Abner comics Sadie Hawkins Day was instituted. The average cost of a new house was \$3,900, a new car was \$860, a U.S. postage stamp was 3 cents and the postman delivered mail twice a day. A loaf of bread was 9 cents. Gasoline was 10 cents a gallon. The top movie of that year was "You Can't Take It With You."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the President, John Garner was the Vice-President. Japan was at war with Russia and Japan had invaded China from Siberia. When I was 3½ years old President Roosevelt told the nation on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Does it make a difference when you are born? I think so. I think we should give serious attention to the Bible's description of when Jesus was born as "when the fullness of the time had come" OR "these last days."

1. Jesus Was Born During the Height of the Roman Empire.

When Jesus was born the Roman Empire included most of Europe except for the British Isles, Scandinavia, Prussia, Russia, and Ukrainia. It included Egypt and most of north Africa, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, the Balkan countries. The effects of the great expanse of this empire were many. Chief among these was the Pax Romana. There was a cessation

of constant warfare between city-states and small countries because they were all under the government of Rome. There was a migration of people from country to country carrying trade items but also carrying different ideas, different values. There was a common language. The official language was Latin. That is what government documents and decrees used. Books were written in Latin. However, Greek was the language of the market place. It was called Koiné Greek. This is the language the New Testament was written in – not Hebrew and not Latin, but the language of the market places.

Jesus was born shortly before Judea was conquered by the Romans and annexed into the Empire. King Herod was able to slaughter the babies in the region of Bethlehem because he was the ruler. However, by the time of Jesus' ministry the Romans were in control and the Jews could not put Jesus to death, they had to turn Him over to the Romans. That suggests that for the time of His ministry He enjoyed a measure of protection because of the Roman occupation.

Jesus was born and ministered a generation before the Roman-Jewish War which began in 66 A.D. In the first battle of that war the Romans received a humiliating defeat. Rome sent a large army and a ruthless general to settle the score. In five years Jerusalem was defeated and the Temple was destroyed. There had been approximately thirty-five years for the Gospel to be disseminated from Judea and Galilee where Jesus had ministered to the whole vast expanse of the Roman Empire. First Galilee and then Judea were conquered and ravaged by the revenging Roman army.

2. Jesus Was Born At A Time of Spiritual Darkness and Hunger.

Zachariah, father of John the Baptist prophesied of his mission-

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,...

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 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." (Luke 1:68-69,76-79 NKJV)

Matthew introduces the beginning of Jesus' preaching this way:

And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:13-17 NKJV)

This spiritual darkness produced a corresponding spiritual hunger.

Psalm 107 describes that in this way:

Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, Bound in affliction and irons- Because they rebelled against the words of God, And despised the counsel of the Most High, Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; They fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, And He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, And broke their chains in pieces. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! (Psalms 107:10-15 NKJV)

This spiritual hunger was manifest in various ways. Among the Gentiles there were bizarre rituals in the so called mystery religions. Among the Jews the Pharisees followed strict compliance to the Law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers. The Essenes had daily baths for purification. This hunger drew people by the thousands to hear the preaching of John the Baptist:

And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:4-6 NKJV)

3. When Jesus Was Born It Was The Time God Had Ordained.

We should not think that God acts in response what mankind is doing. In other words, God did not look down on the world and say, "I see that the Roman Empire has conquered a large number of nations. This has produced a widespread peace and has made it possible for My message to be disseminated to many people quite rapidly. I see that there is spiritual darkness and hunger. I think I will send a Savior to them." Just the opposite was the case.

God ordained the birth of His Son as a human. He ordained that Jesus should bring the message of salvation and then die as a once for all sacrifice for the sins of all who believed in Him. God ordained the exact time that this would happen. All of human history from Adam and Eve onward was unfolding, leading up to the precise time of Jesus' birth. The Star which the Wise Men followed is one proof of this. The movement of heavenly bodies to produce the light of that Star, began thousands or tens of thousands of years beforehand.

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. (Galatians 4:4-5 NKJV)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. (Ephesians 1:7-10 NKJV)

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; (Hebrews 1:1-2 NKJV)

God set the time for Jesus' birth before He made the world. Human history began, and it was moving toward the last day: "fullness of time."

