

What's the Message – Lesson 91

Our lesson today is entitled, “the fullness of time” and evaluates the four centuries between Malachi and the birth of Jesus.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that with this lesson the Lord would enable you to see more clearly how during this period of time it was His hand at work shaping the world for His purpose. Lord, help us to understand that things are often not as they first appear, for it is You who is always in control. Amen.

In our last four lessons we sketched the major events and the cast of people that marched across the pages of history in these four hundred years. Now we need to focus on how these events fit together and worked to shape the world for the coming of our Savior.

Yes, Dale, and let's begin with the Assyrians and the Babylonians. What did they do that fits into our picture? There are two points to be made. First, they showed that God's words are to be counted on. He said, obey Me or I will punish you, and that is exactly what happened. Second, Jews were taken into captivity and spread throughout the world, a dispersion that is still today referred to as “The Diaspora”. As a result, there would be little pockets of people throughout the empire who knew – at least a little bit – about the monotheism of Yahweh, and the prophets' promise of a coming Messiah. This means that there would be recipients ready to receive the message of the Messiah when He came, and the disciples would not be speaking into a vacuum. God's hand was surely at work in this.

And what did the Persians contribute? How about 200 years of autonomy and peace, allowing Judah to grow as a nation, in religion undisturbed. And the emphasis of keeping God's Law, as taught by Ezra, carried on in men dedicated to this task.

But with the coming of Alexander and the spread of Greek culture, something more than warfare and new overlords happened. For the first time since the Tower of Babel, the world now used a common language.

From Spain in the west, to India in the east, there would be people who knew enough Greek that people could communicate, and would hear the message of the promised Messiah and accept it. This did not change with the coming of the Romans – Greek was still the common language of commerce, and of scholars.

Rome was now the master of the western world. And with that came a time of peace that was previously unknown. It is still referred to today as the “Pax Romana,” the peace of Rome. It enabled people to move about and exchange not only items of commerce, but also ideas, without fear of violence. And there were thousands of miles of roads, originally built to enable Caesar’s legions to move quickly to put down any uprisings, but roads that now made it easier and safer for Christians to spread the news of the coming of Jesus.

God had used people who had gained fame through their brutality and bloodshed, to be the tools that enabled the message of the Prince of Peace to be spread throughout the empire.

So we have the dispersion that put people in place everywhere you turned, a common language to communicate with, the unparalleled peace of Rome, and roads to move from one end of the empire to the other. Seems like all the necessary tools are in place. But would people be ready to accept the message? After all, the Greeks and Romans had a pantheon full of gods and goddesses. Would they really be ready to abandon them and turn to a single God?

There definitely was spiritual confusion in the world. Pagans were not finding solutions with their gods, only a yearning to hear from someone that could provide answers and guidance to the daily issues of life. And it was a time filled with degraded immorality. As one writer put it: “All the splendor of the empire couldn’t hide the moral corruption, the sensuousness, the festering despondency and despair, the waste of life, and the injustice that scarred the citizenry.” It certainly seems like it was the fullness of time from this viewpoint also. The gentiles were ready for a new message, too.

And the Jews had some confusion on their part to deal with. Yes, they continued to look for God’s deliverance, but throughout this period they continued to look for it in political deliverance and military action. They looked for a new “Kingdom of David” and a Davidic

kind of Messiah. Even the disciples asked Jesus at His ascension, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Lest we criticize their blindness too much, ask ourselves, can we see God’s plan of “victory” any clearer? Given the historical setting we’ve been reviewing, would you have accepted Jesus as the Christ? Many Jews were looking for a different kind of Messiah. But don’t many people today want a different kind of Christ, one who is not so personally demanding of them? One that we can take or leave at our convenience? One that will fight our battles for us and reward us with a life of comfort? But is it not also a time for each of us to act? Don’t we have a special job to do as God’s tools, His arms and voice in this world?

God had used history to shape the world so that it was “the fullness of time” for the coming of His Son. But, do we see Jesus any clearer today than the Jews did then? And how can we know Him better, except by studying His life and words as recorded in the New Testament? So then, let us turn now to that study, and commit ourselves to a dedicated effort to learn more about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

Next time we will begin our study of the New Testament, with “Lessons from Jesus – as True God.”