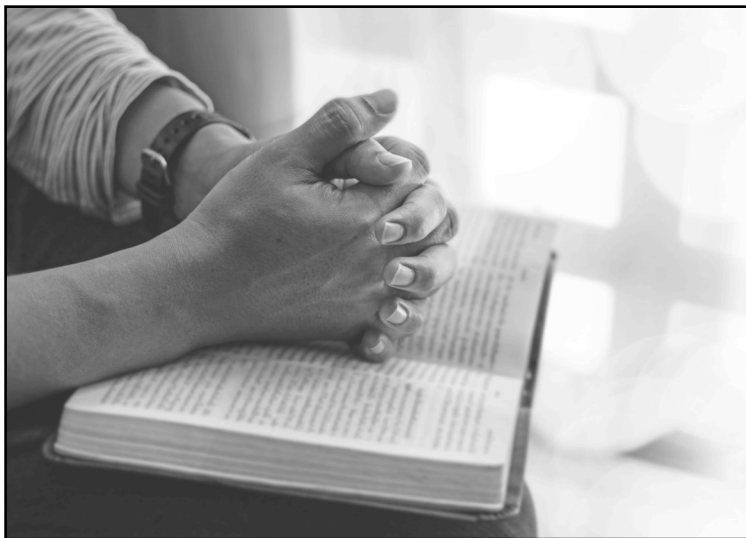


Bible Lessons



*So teach us to number our days, that we may
apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

—Psalm 90:12

Volume 55, No. 4
October • November • December
2023

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Volume 55

October • November • December

No. 4

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*Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.
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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THE 4th QUARTER, 2023

TIME

Time—is it merely the ticking of the clock on the mantel? Or are there other concepts about time we would be wise to consider? It is easy to take time for granted, because we are so accustomed to it and deal with it continually. Regardless of how we feel about it, time is relentless in its pursuit of eternity. Once a moment has passed, we will never see it again.

This quarter, we will discuss the creation of time, how God regards time, and how we view time. The other things to consider include how time impacts our lives, how wisely or unwisely we use it, how much of it we have, and what happens when our time runs out.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

—Bro. Clifford Cole

OCTOBER 1, 2023

IN THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness

comprehended it not.

Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Psalms 19:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,

5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.

6 His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Psalms 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

MEMORY VERSE: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. —**Genesis 1:1**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: “In the beginning” infers there was a starting point for creation. God created everything and started what we call *time*. Time is universal throughout the whole earth, being divided into days and nights. No one can alter its pattern. Its regularity, as well as our utter dependance upon that regularity, magnifies the glory of our creator, the God of heaven, the God of earth, and the

God of everything beyond our world. Before time began, God was. The power of self-existence belongs only to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus made mention of the glory which existed before creation. How great God is!

WORD DEFINITIONS

Gen 1:1 **“In the beginning”**: is always used in reference to time [the beginning of time].

Gen 1:5 **“And the evening and the morning were the first day”**: This pattern is repeated throughout the rest of the first chapter of Genesis, naming out the second day, third day, and fourth day, etc. God ended the pattern with the seventh day, as described in Genesis 2:1-3.

Psa 19:1 **“The heavens declare the glory of God”**: The sky numbers the splendor and honor of the Almighty.

Psa 19:2 **“Day unto day”**: Another reminder of the continuity and regularity of the passage of time and the glory this gives God.

Psa 19:6 **“His circuit”**: a revolution of the sun. (*Strong’s*); another description of one day.

Psa 90:2 **“From everlasting to everlasting”**: describing eternity, which existed before the creation of time and eternity, which will exist after the end of time.

Isa 46:10 **“Declaring the end from the beginning”**: God started time by speaking it into existence, and He will finish it the same way.

LESSON BACKGROUND

God always was, and He always will be. He decided, in His infinite wisdom, to create a temporary dimension called time in which His creation would dwell. Time is merely an expression of the short duration of God’s creation, inserted into the vast reaches of eternity. Man had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of time. Mankind, however, has always observed the pattern of time, as God intended, thereby giving glory to God.

DISCUSSION:

1. The first two chapters of Genesis describe what God created on each of the first six days. Describe the wisdom God demonstrated in establishing a pattern of days and nights, ending with a total of seven.
2. What benefit is there to us to recognize that God existed before creation—before time began?
3. How are people affected that do not properly understand, or acknowledge, that creation and time were spoken into existence by a divine creator?
4. How accurate is time?
5. How dependent are we upon time?
6. Describe what would happen if God allowed time to become erratic and random—to where mankind was no longer able to accurately mark the passage of time, because all patterns of time ceased to exist.
7. Why do some people believe that time, with all the dependable cycles observed throughout the universe, came into existence by chance with no intelligence behind its creation?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Our daughters gave me a new automatic watch for Father’s Day a few years ago. I enjoy the fact that I never have to wind it, nor do I have to put batteries in it. Some of the common traits of automatic watches are: 1) They do not need batteries or manual winding since normal arm movements wind the watch; 2) They have jewels in key friction areas to ensure long-term time keeping accuracy. Without the jewels, certain areas of the watch mechanism would begin to wear, increasing friction and degrading the accuracy of the movement, and 3) The watches were not made for any specific person—they were made to keep time equally well, for whomever happens to wear them.

To enlarge on the last of the three points, watches and clocks do not “own” time nor do they “create” time. They simply “keep” time as accurately as possible. It is the purpose of every watch or clock ever produced to keep time as accurately as possible, yet with the realization that they all need minor adjustments occasionally. Atomic

clocks lose one second every 100 million years, while the average quartz clock loses one second every two years. Jun Ye, a physicist working in a joint venture with the National Institute of Standards and Technology and with the University of Colorado Boulder, developed an optical clock that loses one second every 15 billion years. (From an article in labroots.com.) One second every 15 billion years is extremely accurate—but it is not perfect, is it? God, the author of time, is the one that made the perfect clock. It is a little over 6000 years old. It started “ticking” the first day of creation and has been doing a marvelous job ever since. It will keep running, with complete accuracy, until the end of time—then it will cease to run throughout the rest of eternity.

The unique aspect of God’s clock is that it is not a physical time-keeping piece. It simply is. Mankind has been trying to match its accuracy for a long, long time but never will quite get there. God created time, not man. No one will ever be able to place a legitimate claim on time nor should they be allowed to patent it. Time is on loan to us from its creator, our creator.

“Dear God, Thank you for creating us and everything we love and enjoy here on earth. Thank you for creating time. Help us to be good stewards of the time you loan us, not abusing it nor taking it for granted. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

Time. What is time? This question is very interesting as a conversational piece, and I often ask it of people, although I do not claim to be an expert on the thought myself. The answers I receive vary as much as night and day.

Revelation 1:8 states, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.” An eternal God who has no beginning nor ending among that which is eternal, decided to make that which has a beginning and an ending.

I do acclaim that God created time. Genesis 1:13 states, “And the evening and the morning were the third day.” Verse 14 states, “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.” We are given that which is called time: the great time clock that God created. The earth rotates completely

on the earth's poles in relation to the sun and gives us our seasons. As the moon travels around the earth, the sun's rays on the moon are always changing, its rays sometimes partially blocked by the earth. This lunar cycle comprises roughly 29 to 30 days; thus we have a month.

Almost all inhabitants of the earth adhere to God's time clock. Birds migrate; bears hibernate; animals mate, and young are born. Things grow and then they go dormant.

Revelation 10:6 speaks about when "there should be time no longer." Luke 21:33 says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away." Song #335, (Evening Light Songs) verse 4 states, "When old earth shall cease to travel, and when time shall be no more." 2 Peter 3:10 states that the heavens shall pass away and the earth shall be burned up. There will be an end to time as we know it.

What is time? Time is the turning and traveling of the earth within eternity.

—Bro. E.E. Gracey

Clarification: Referring to the July 16, 2023, Reflections—To be clear, anybody that is teaching that interracial marriage is a sin, in and of itself, is teaching false doctrine. Let us not be swayed by our culture, but let us be swayed by the Word of God.

—Bro. E. E. Gracey

OCTOBER 8, 2023

AT THE APPOINTED TIME

1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head [*Saul*], and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

8 And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.

9 And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.

1 Samuel 13:1 Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

2 Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.

3 And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

4 And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

5 And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

7 And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

9 And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

10 And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

11 And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash;

12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast

not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

MEMORY VERSE: And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. —**Isaiah 30:18**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The prophet Samuel told King Saul twice, “Seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.” Both times were critical. Saul waited the first time, but failed to wait the full seven days the second time. Because of his failure to wait the second time, the kingdom was taken from Saul.

WORD DEFINITIONS

1Sa 10:8 “**Seven days**”: The number seven represents a complete period; a fullness of time.

1Sa 10:8 “**Tarry**”: wait patiently; hope; trust.

1Sa 13:12 “**I forced myself**”: “It was with great reluctance that I did what I did.” (*Adam Clarke*)

LESSON BACKGROUND

In both instances where Samuel instructed King Saul to wait seven days, he also told him that he would be told what to do on the seventh day. Saul was not only to wait; he was to receive instructions at the end of the waiting period. Sometimes, instructions have two or more components. If all of them are not fulfilled, the task is considered incomplete. Saul evidently waited long enough the first time he was told to wait, because the outcome of this waiting period was positive. However, when Saul was told the second time to wait seven days, he grew impatient and “forced himself” to offer the

sacrifice—presumably to obtain directly from the LORD the instructions for which he felt he had waited long enough. The commentator, F.B. Meyer, believes that had Saul waited only thirty minutes longer, Samuel would have arrived, offered the sacrifice, and given Saul the instructions he needed so desperately.

DISCUSSION:

1. What benefit did Saul obtain by waiting the full seven days for Samuel in Gilgal after he was anointed king?
2. How difficult might it have been for Saul to wait the full seven days?
3. Did Saul find it difficult to wait the full seven days the second time he was told to do so?
4. What other condition, besides waiting, was put on Saul both times he was told to tarry seven days?
5. Saul had an excuse for not waiting quite long enough the second time. What was it?
6. What was Samuel's response to Saul's excuse?
7. How important is it to wait when God tells us to wait?
8. Why does God sometimes tell us to wait for further instructions instead of telling us everything at once?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Years ago, a certain king decided to hold a series of contests for the purpose of determining who would win the hand of his daughter in marriage. Several young men entered their name, each hoping he would be the fortunate one. After a few days, most of the young men were eliminated. On the last day of the contests, the king told the three finalists that the winner of a foot race would be the king's new son-in-law.

The three men lined up for the race, eager to be off and running. Sitting in the stands several feet from the starting line, the king instructed the three runners, "When you hear me say 'go', that is your cue to begin the race."

All three young men looked intently at the king, waiting for his word. Suddenly, one of the runners took off running. After a moment the second followed in hot pursuit. The third young man, watching

the other two speeding away, kept glancing at the king, hoping he would give the word to start. He did not know why the other two had started running, and his hopes of winning the hand of the king's daughter were fading with every step of the other two runners.

For the first several seconds, as the other two runners ran away at top speed, the third young man thought, "If the king would just give the word, I might yet overtake the other two!" With each passing moment, with no word from the king, the young man realized that all hope of winning was quickly slipping away.

The king watched the two-man race with great interest but paid no attention to the young man waiting at the starting line. The race finally concluded, with the young man that had started out first crossing the finish line shortly before the other runner.

As the first young man appeared before the king, the king asked him, "Young man, you did a fine job of running! I must ask, however, why you started running?" "Your highness, I thought I heard you give the word to start," the runner said. "Very well, young man, stand aside a moment." As the second runner approached, the king said, "Young man, you also ran very well. Why, though, did you start running?" "Your highness, I started running when the first runner started. I assumed he had heard you give the word to start." "I see," said the king. "Stand aside a moment." Calling the third young man to him, the king inquired, "Young man, why did you not run with the other two runners?" "Your highness, I did not hear you give the word to start!" "Very good young man," the king said. "I knew you could run, but I didn't know if you could wait!"

In the confusion and noise surrounding the last contest, the first runner mistakenly thought he heard the king give the word to start. He began running, with the second young man following close behind. The third young man never did hear the king and refused to run without getting a clear signal. Because of his steadfastness in obeying the king's edict, despite the peer pressure from the other two runners, he won the hand of the king's daughter.

"Dear Heavenly Father, Help me to wait on you, even though I am sometimes tempted to act before you give the word. Thank you for understanding my situations in life infinitely better than I do. Help me to wait on your timing and to know your mind and not move forward in "my timing" and with my own thinking! Amen."

REFLECTIONS

The Bible is filled with appointed times. Sometimes the appointed times are specific to individuals, sometimes specific to a group of people for judgement or relief, and even overarching to all of humanity, such as death and judgment.

In Genesis 18:14, God asked Abraham a question, “Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” This was a specifically appointed time for Abraham and Sarah, as well as for Isaac, yet to be born. Faith was needed to wait for it, but at the appointed time their faith was fulfilled in sight!

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, spoke to the people repeatedly about their need to heed God and His “appointed time” for them to willingly surrender themselves into Babylonian captivity as a consequence of their sins; this was for their safety so that they could avoid the sword, famine, and pestilence that was to come upon those that refused to obey.

Seasons, the sunrise and sunset, sowing and harvest times are also all appointed by God. We do well to look to understand and move in the appointed times. To sow a summer crop in the fall as winter is coming on is foolishness. Yet many seem to want to wait until later in life to sow unto the Lord and wonder why they do not see much fruit.

Jesus had an appointed time in which He was sent to the earth. This time was much anticipated, as the people looked for salvation from their oppressors. The Messiah did indeed come, as prophesied, yet many refused Him and so today are still waiting for the “appointed time.”

We, as saved in Christ, also look forward in hope to an appointed day whose time only the Father knows—the great and terrible day of the Lord. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. (1 Th 5:9-11)”

May we be found ready at the appointed times for all that the Lord has for us, throughout our lives till we stand before Him and our faith is lost in sight!

—Bro. Eric Doolittle

OCTOBER 15, 2023

THREE DAYS LATE, BUT JUST IN TIME

John 11:17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he [*Lazarus*] had lain in the grave four days already.

32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,

34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

37 And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Genesis 40:12 And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days:

13 Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

14 But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

20 And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

21 And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand:

23 Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Genesis 41:1 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river.

8 And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

9 Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day:

12 And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret.

14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.

16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the

east wind shall be seven years of famine.

29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

34 Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.

38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

40 Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

MEMORY VERSE: Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. —**John 11:39**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: There are times when God seems to forget about us in our difficulty. Unlike the times when Samuel told King Saul to “wait seven days,” we may not hear anything at all from the Lord and do not know how long it will be before the answer comes—or even an idea of when to hope for an answer. Fear not. God may be “late” in our opinion, but He is always “just in time”!

WORD DEFINITIONS

Joh 11:17 “**Lain in the grave four days**”: Albert Barnes and Adam Clarke point out that, for some reason, Lazarus had not been embalmed, but was simply laid in the tomb.

Joh 11:39 “**By this time he stinketh**”: The Jewish Talmud states that a person is truly dead on the fourth day. There is no hope of the soul returning to the body beyond the third day.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that His friend, Lazarus, was sick. Jesus loved Lazarus, but He tarried two days before he started the two-day journey to Bethany. By the time Jesus arrived, it seemed He was too late—because of the common belief that no one could be raised from the dead after four days.

Joseph hoped he would be remembered by the chief butler, but, alas, one month went by, then two, then six months—but still no word back from the court of Pharaoh. A year passed, then another year. Two years is a long time to wait for a promise to be fulfilled, especially if you feel like the person owes you a debt of gratitude.

DISCUSSION:

1. Jesus purposely waited two days before starting the journey to Bethany. Why did He wait?
2. “Jesus wept.” What does this tell us about God’s concern with our grief?
3. When we are grieving and questioning with thoughts of why we must suffer, what realization can bring us comfort?
4. Why does God not always reveal to us His plans or His timing?
5. How might we be tempted to feel when we are “forgotten in the prison”? How important was it for Joseph to trust God’s timing?
6. What is the purpose of God’s providence and timing?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

A few mechanical watches have multiple hands and indicators, with some moving quickly and others moving more slowly. It is fascinating to observe the inner workings when the back is off, or if it is a “skeleton” model with a clear case. Some of the gears and mechanical movements turn rapidly, driving the slower moving gears, which in turn move the slowest gears. It is futile to try to hurry up the slower moving parts of a watch, because they are designed to move slower.

Many times, specific events in our lives happen frequently. Some circumstances in life, however, happen only occasionally, with others happening rarely, and a few happening only once in a lifetime. We

have little, if any, control over some of these events. We have no choice as to the date of our birth, and no choice as to the time we leave this world.

There are certain happenings in life that seem random, or unpredictable. We do not know when they will occur nor how fast we will move through them. Even when some of the events catch us by surprise, they do not surprise God. They are part of the “movements in our watch,” and will play out at the time they are designed.

“Heavenly Father, I submit to your design for my life. Though I may not understand everything that is happening, help me to trust your perfect planning and timing. I know it will all come out right in the end. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

The humid heat radiated off the asphalt of the empty parking lot. The days languished with lack of customers, yet they flew by with bill due dates swiftly approaching. The family florist business, still in its infancy, had been started with an abundance of enthusiasm, not cash. A particularly large and crucial bill was due. In the depths of a long summer with nothing on the calendar, what could possibly generate the amount we needed in so short a time? All excess spending had long since been cut, including paychecks. We were praying for God to provide. If this bill wasn't met, it would be the beginning of the end with serious consequences to all four of the families that comprised the owners. The due date came and went. Nothing, not even a cloud in the sky the size of a man's hand. “Heavenly Father, please help us. We're desperate.”

Perhaps a day or so later, a car pulled up, and a family came in needing flowers for a funeral. The phone rang over and over; customers came in, and orders for floral arrangements began to pile up until, not only was the amount provided to buy the supplies and flowers needed to fill the orders, but also to pay the bill and late fee. God still answers prayer—“sometimes late, but always just in time.” He proved Himself over and over again for the entire ten years we owned the business. “He is faithful that promised” (Hebrews 10:23b).

—Sis. Diane Doolittle

OCTOBER 22, 2023

A TIME AND SEASON FOR EVERYTHING

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Daniel 2:19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

MEMORY VERSE: To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. — **Ecclesiastes 3:1**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Life is not static. It is full of changes, from beginning to end. In the span of our lifetime, we experience many

“opposites,” but that is the way God designed it. God is also in control of the timing of these seemingly contradictory events in our lives. It is good that we recognize the wisdom of God allowing these events to take place. It is also proper that we trust God’s timing. There are situations in life that we will naturally feel are not “fair” or “proper.” God is still in control, even when everything feels out of control. He allows certain things to happen, not just because He gave man a free will, but because He has an overall plan in mind to get as many souls to Heaven as possible.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ecc 3:1 **“Season”**: an appointed occasion.

Dan 2:21 **“He changeth the times and the seasons”**: God is the author of the timing and seasons of all life events—both on an individual level, as well as on a corporate level concerning nations and empires.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Lord gave Solomon great wisdom, far above his peers. Solomon understood there is a time and season for everything, as described in Ecclesiastes 3. It is possible that Solomon did not fully understand this great truth before God blessed him with great wisdom. Mankind naturally tends to think more of the “here and now” and the pleasures of the moment, rather than considering what is proper, good, and wholesome.

An infant is incapable of processing “times and seasons.” The only thought they have is for the moment. If they are hungry, tired, scared, or ill, they simply give vent to their feelings and cry. As maturity comes along, children learn a little patience and discipline, which helps them through some of the rough spots in life. It is so easy to keep some of these same selfish thought patterns into adulthood. It takes real maturity to fully recognize and incorporate the concept of everything having a proper time and season in life, rather than wanting it “right now.”

Salvation and sanctification are God’s way of bringing us to the level of maturity that allows “a time and season for everything.” Without salvation and sanctification, carnal man is too selfish to wait

on God's timing and too self-centered to always consider what is appropriate in all circumstances.

Daniel and his three friends were taken captive at a young age from their homeland and brought to a foreign land with godless customs. Through their acceptance of God's providence in all their difficulties, Daniel and his friends were able to navigate the ups and downs they experienced in life. They understood that God was the one who set up kings and later removed them.

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the likely result of deciding something is exempt from the "proper season" principle?
2. How does believing "every purpose under heaven" impact our view of God's sovereignty?
3. In the list of opposites in Ecclesiastes 3, why does our flesh sometimes want the one not proper for that time?
4. Why did God ordain that the race will not always be won by the swift, and not every battle won by the strong?
5. How did Daniel's belief that God set kings up and removed them at his pleasure help him remain faithful?
6. What most likely would have happened to Daniel if he had not firmly believed God was in control?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Corrie Ten Boom was a young girl when she asked her father a serious question – a question far too old for her young years. "He turned to look at me, as he always did when answering a question, but to my surprise he said nothing. At last, he stood up, lifted his traveling case off of the overhead rack and set it on the floor. Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?" he said. I stood up and tugged at it. It was crammed with the watches and spare parts he had purchased that morning. "It's too heavy," I said. "Yes," he replied, "and it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It's the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger, you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you" (*Corrie Ten Boom, The Hiding Place*).

As a young person, I distinctly remember sitting in a camp meeting service listening to a message on offenses. During some of the comments and exhortations after the message, I thought to myself, "I don't understand why some people struggle with being offended." My parents, much to their credit, had shielded me during my upbringing from many things too old for my age. At the time, I did not fully understand how things can hurt a person deeply. I am so thankful for what my parents did for me. The time eventually came, however, when I had to face issues that I would not have been able to handle earlier. I know now that God was merciful to me, protecting me from hurts that would have destroyed me earlier.

"Dear Lord, Thank you for your infinite wisdom in establishing the principle of "A Time and Season for Everything!" You understand what I can bear in life and when I can do so. Your timing is perfect. Help me rest in this knowledge. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us times and seasons in which to fulfill His purposes. It is important we understand and respect them and recognize them as opportunities for God.

The question is, "What are we doing with the time and the season that God has given us"? Are we using it wisely? Can God get glory out of our "season"? If we recognize each season as an opportunity for God, we can fulfill His purpose in our lives and, in turn, fill it with rich blessings for others.

The challenge is, "What are we doing with our time and the season we are in"? Are we making sure that each moment counts, or are we wasting it with frivolous activities that have no eternal value? We don't want to waste time on activities of empty entertainment, but we want to fill our time with things that will strengthen our resolve to please God.

When we study Daniel's life, we find that he lived a consistent godly example before those around him. The season that he was in was not always pleasant, but he maintained a level of excellence that has been a blessing to the generations that followed.

We want to use our time in such a way that we will be a help to others. "May all who come behind us find us faithful."

—Sis. Doris Clay

OCTOBER 29, 2023

REDEEMING THE TIME

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Luke 12:35 Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;

36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

38 And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39 And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

40 Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

John 9:4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

Ephesians 5:15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

MEMORY VERSE: Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. —**Colossians 4:5**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: There is a span of time given to each one of us on the day of our birth. God, in His wisdom, does not reveal the

length of time given us to do His work; therefore, it is imperative that we make the best use of the time we have at hand.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luk 12:35 **“Let your loins be girded about”**: In Bible times, the long flowing robe of the outer garment was tied up with a sash during manual labor, walking, or running. (*Barnes*)

Luk 12: 36 **“Like unto men that wait for their lord”**: active, rather than passive waiting.

Eph 5:15 **“Circumspectly”**: to look round about on all hands; to be every way watchful, wary, and cautious, in order to avoid danger, discern enemies before they come too nigh, and secure a man’s interest by every possible and lawful means. (*Clarke*)

Eph 5:16 **“Redeeming the time”**: to rescue from loss; to improve opportunity.

2 Ti 4:2 **“Be instant in season, out of season”**: urgent in prosperous times as well as difficult times; take advantage of every opportunity; when there is no opportunity seek to make one; do not be contented or complacent with what is at hand, but seek for more. (*Condensed from Clarke*)

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus warned in Luke 12:40 that He would return when everyone least expected it. For those not anticipating and watching for His return, it will be a dreadful time—because they did not redeem the time they had available. The parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, as well as the parable of talents given to the servants, are good examples of some who were found diligently waiting and watching for the Lord’s second coming. We are to be actively engaged in our work when He comes lest we be found sleeping and unprepared.

DISCUSSION:

1. How much time do we have before the Lord’s second coming?
2. Why will Jesus come again at a time when we least expect it?
3. What attitude will help us be prepared when Jesus returns?

4. Describe some of the hinderances to redeeming the time.
5. What happens to time and opportunity that is not redeemed?
6. What can happen to those who choose not to redeem the time?
7. Who might be affected, and how, when time is not redeemed?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Redeeming the time is well illustrated by the story of the tortoise and the hare. Since the hare was much faster than the tortoise, he regarded the race with disdain and took a nap before running. When he awoke, it was too late to win the race; the tortoise was just about to cross the finish line. The tortoise, on the other hand, realizing he needed to take advantage of every moment, immediately started for the finish line as best as he could. No, he was not fast, but he redeemed the time!

My Grandpa was a wonderful example of someone who learned to redeem the time. He never seemed to work fast, but he was steady. At the end of the day, it was amazing to see what he had accomplished! At the age of 75, he helped me cut down several oak trees on our property. He ran the chainsaw all day while I stacked limbs and cleaned up. At the end of the day, he had outworked me. Handling a chainsaw all day is not an easy job. I have done it on occasion, and the saw gets very heavy after using it for several hours.

Grandpa did not have brute strength, but he possessed grit, determination, and a calculating eye. He learned how to think through a project to make the best use of time and energy expended. While cutting wood, he would sharpen the chain on his chainsaw during rest periods. While splitting firewood and needing a break, he would pull out his New Testament and read a chapter or two. As a young man ironing clothes, he would prop his Bible up and read a few verses and meditate on them. At work, he kept his New Testament with him to read during breaks and his lunch hour.

There are a few old sayings that support the Bible's admonition to redeem the time: 1) "A stitch in time saves nine," 2) "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today," and 3) "Take care of the minutes and the hours will take care of themselves."

"Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of time! Help me to redeem the time you loan me in life. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

Ephesians 5:17 encourages us to understand what the will of the Lord is. 2 Peter 3:9 states that, “The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Soul-winning is an essential and fundamental responsibility God gives all Christians. With our limited time on earth, we must prioritize following the Great Commission from Christ: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

“Then saith he [*Jesus*] unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few” (Matthew 9:37). If you’ve ever been somewhere that was understaffed, you know exactly how valuable time and labor are. We should make the most of every opportunity we have to further the kingdom of God. This does not exclusively apply to mission work in another country. We are to proclaim the goodness of God to everyone we meet, at home or abroad. The essence of preaching the gospel is telling the wonderful change Christ is able to bring to individual lives. God wants you to share your experience with those around you.

We never know how close to eternity the souls we come in contact with are. Pray for the Lord to provide opportunities to share the Good News. When He does, redeem the time and “boldly...make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19).

Do We Well? By Clara M. Brooks (Evening Light Hymnal #451)

*While a soul remains in darkness, and in idleness we dwell,
Selfishly the truth enjoying, brethren dear we do not well.*

—Sis. Serena Johnson

NOVEMBER 5, 2023

TIMES OF REFRESHING

Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the

wearied to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men

of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

MEMORY VERSE: Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. —**Acts 3:19**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God has always longed for His people to have rest. Throughout the Old Testament He inspired the prophets to write of a day to come when a sin-sick world could have true rest from taking their own way in life and a day in which they would have rest from their sins. Unfortunately, Israel often wandered from God’s precepts, striving to make their own rest, but they found heartache instead. In Acts 3, Peter reminded the people that they could have rest and experience refreshment from the presence of the Lord if they would repent and be converted.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isa 28:11 “Stammering lips and another tongue”: The words here translate to “foreigners speaking in a strange tongue in a derisive and scornful manner.” (*Strong’s*) Israel went into bondage where their captors taught them many hard lessons they had refused to learn from the mouth of God’s prophets. (*Barnes*)

Isa 28:16 “Shall not make haste”: will not be ashamed. The foundation of the Lord is so firm and secure there is no need to be afraid or flee to another place of safety. (*Condensed from Barnes*)

Act 3:19 “Times of refreshing”: opportunity or season for recovery of breath; revival.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Israelites were a stubborn, proud, and stiff-necked people. God wanted the best for them but could not give it to them because of their rebellion. The Lord allowed Israel to go into captivity and bondage for many years, where they learned that it is best to follow God.

Hundreds of years later, Israel still wanted to have their own way. They killed Jesus on a Roman cross, thinking they had rid themselves of their troubles. Jesus rose the third day, however, and brought the plan of salvation to the very ones that had scorned God's way for generations.

As Peter pointed out in Acts 3, we can have the "times of refreshing" and freedom from our own way when we repent and are converted. Praise God for His perfect plan!

DISCUSSION:

1. Why does mankind many times choose to learn important things the hard way?
2. What lessons did the Lord hope His people would learn in their captivity?
3. How can making and taking our own path lead to unhappiness and ultimate destruction?
4. Isaiah 28:15 speaks of a time when Israel made lies their refuge and hid under falsehood. How does this take place today, and what does it look like?
5. Of what prophecy does Isaiah 28:16 speak?
6. How is not feeling a necessity to "make haste" part of the refreshing the Lord has for us?
7. How does repenting of sins and being converted bring "times of refreshing"?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Acts 12 gives the account of Peter's imprisonment for preaching the gospel—an account which documents the incredible fact that he *slept* while in seemingly dire circumstances. Perhaps the scene looked something like this: Peter, chained to two prison guards,

yawned and stretched as best he could. It had been a long and eventful day. Arrested soon after James' execution, escorted to prison, and put under the watchful eye of sixteen soldiers, he was then told he would be next in line for execution! This threat was enough to make the stoutest heart quake—but Peter was yawning!

Not able to stay awake any longer, Peter drifted off to sleep. The two guards looked at each other in amazement. The soldier chained to Peter's right arm remarked, "How is this man so at peace, knowing he will be executed tomorrow?" The other soldier replied, "It is curious, isn't it? We beat him severely, then Herod told him that he would be following James' path tomorrow. I do not understand it at all. I long for what he has, though!"

The peace Peter enjoyed, to the astonishment of his guards, was not something he had always possessed. His spontaneous personality had given him fits, right up to the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit had come upon him and the others in the upper room. Since that day, he felt a presence that defied description—almost too good to be true, but very real! Even now, he knew that if God did not intervene, he would be put on trial the next day and executed. Despite the knowledge of his imminent death, Peter was relaxed and calm.

Peter, along with the others praying in the upper room, had reached the point of surrender and humility the Lord was seeking. The Spirit was poured out on them without measure. They were "filled with power from on high." This power freed them from the fear of failure and delivered them from the torment of what might come to pass. It no longer mattered what the world thought. The unknown lost its terror. A deep love for souls filled their hearts. Their foremost thoughts were, "What can I do for Jesus today?"

The rest Peter enjoyed in his soul, mind, and body, can be ours today. The only requirement on our part is a complete surrender to God. The first step is salvation. The second step is entire consecration and surrender to God's will in our life—sanctification. This complete surrender takes the burden and responsibility of our welfare off our shoulders and places it in the capable hands of our Heavenly Father! The final step in enjoying "*times of refreshing*" on a continual basis is to remember we are no longer in charge of what happens to us. Our trust is in God. We know He will take care of the present circumstances, no matter how grim they appear to be.

“Heavenly Father, Thank you for your gift of salvation and sanctification! I choose to let you have your will and way with me today. Thank you for the ‘Times of Refreshing’ when I need it most! Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

The songwriter, Joseph Swain, wrote:

*“O Thou in Whose presence my soul takes delight,
On Whom in affliction I call,
My comfort by day, and my song in the night,
My hope, my salvation, my all!”*

Truly, there is nothing more refreshing to the souls of the righteous than the conscious realization of the Lord’s presence. David said, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps 16:11).

The Lord reveals Himself to His trusting children in various ways and by various means. We receive refreshment through prayer—personal communion with God. Songwriter Clara M. Brooks penned these words:

*“There’s stealing o’er my peaceful, trusting soul,
A power that is most divinely sweet,
As all my burdens on the Lord I roll,
And meekly linger at His blessed feet.”*

Songs are another source of refreshment for our souls! I cannot count the times during my years of living for the Lord when the Holy Spirit suddenly, out of the clear blue, so to speak, flooded my heart and mind with a song that was just what I needed for the occasion. As I meditated on the encouraging words, my soul was refreshed, inspired, and strengthened while feeling the very presence of the Lord through the song.

Meeting with the saints of God at appointed times of worship is another means of much refreshing from the presence of the Lord. This act is very important. (See Hebrews 10:24-25.) Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in

the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). If you want to experience a time of refreshing from the Lord’s presence, gather with His people! Jesus will be there! How refreshing it is to receive the nourishment that every joint and band of His spiritual body supplies! (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 2:19.)

Let us avail ourselves of every opportunity to be refreshed by the Lord’s presence.

–Bro. Harlan Sorrell

NOVEMBER 12, 2023

TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

Job 7:1 Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?

Psalms 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.

MEMORY VERSE: So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. —**Psalm 90:12**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Each one of us has an appointed time to be born and to die. The clock starts ticking when we are formed and stops when we leave this world for our long home. We do well to keep this in mind while we still have time on our side and can make a difference. We are exhorted in Psalm 90:12 to number our days. How can we do this if we do not know when our days are to end? Simply, we *don't* know how many days we have, which is all the more reason to cherish the day we have before us and not be presumptuous about how many we have left!

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ecc 12:3 **“Keepers of the house shall tremble”**: hands shake.

Ecc 12:3 **“Strong men shall bow themselves”**: legs become feeble.

Ecc 12:3 **“Grinders cease because they are few”**: loss of teeth and the resulting difficulty.

Ecc 12:3 **“Those that look out of the windows be darkened”**: eyes become dim.

Ecc 12:4 **“Doors shall be shut in the streets”**: loss of the desire to speak.

Ecc 12:4 **“Rise up at the voice of the bird”**: inability to sleep soundly.

Ecc 12:4 **“Daughters of musick shall be brought low”**: loss of hearing.

Ecc 12:5 **“Almond tree shall flourish”**: The white flowers of the almond tree resemble gray hair.

Ecc 12:5 **“Grasshopper shall be a burden”**: small things in life become burdensome.

LESSON BACKGROUND

As a child, Solomon heard the stories of God enabling his father to kill the lion and the bear who threatened the sheep. The story of God

directing the stone to Goliath's forehead was especially thrilling! Shaking his head in disbelief, Solomon marveled at the accounts of his father running for his life from his own father-in-law, King Saul.

When Solomon was a little older, he had to grapple with the fact his mother was once another man's wife. The numerous instances of painful family drama, resulting in David's inability to properly discipline his sons, was not lost on Solomon either. Thankfully, despite it all, Solomon was also witness to God's love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace granted to his father.

Crowned as king in his father's stead, young King Solomon listened intently to his aged father's final instructions and blessings. He watched with profound sadness as his father gathered his feet up in his bed and breathed his last. "How quickly life passes!"

DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the full circle of life Solomon heard about and witnessed in his father's life.
2. Why does youth find it difficult to see the evil days ahead?
3. What danger is there in closing our eyes to the inevitable decline of our human life?
4. Name a few of the things that happens to an older person.
5. How successful has mankind been in stopping the aging process?
6. Who determines our length of days?
7. Why do older people often exclaim, "The years have flown by"?
8. Why are we not notified of our death date early in life so we can "plan for it"?
9. Since we do not know when we will die, what is the prudent thing to do?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

King David's days can be divided into four stages: youth, fugitive, warrior king, and old king. In each stage there were many times David's life could have been cut short; yet, the LORD protected him. He died of old age at seventy, "full of days, riches, and honour" (1 Chronicles 29:28a).

David's early days were spent taking care of his father's sheep. Being the youngest of eight sons, there were probably many times he

was tempted to think, “I’m not doing anything important. I’m just a shepherd boy!”

At the age of fifteen, he was anointed king by Samuel, because he was “a man after God’s own heart.” Not long after being anointed king, David killed Goliath. That event ended his days of being a shepherd and started the next chapter in his life as a fugitive. After a short time of favor in King Saul’s court, David was married to Michael, King Saul’s youngest daughter. Their days of a happy marriage were brief due to his father-in-law’s jealousy, and David had to flee for his life. He spent the next fifteen years on the run.

The third chapter of David’s life started when King Saul lost his life by his own hand on the battlefield with the Philistines. David was thirty years old. The next eighteen years were filled with success for King David. The LORD blessed him with a large family and gave him victory after victory on the battlefield.

At the age of forty-eight, David retired from active military life. His retirement from battle may have been from the advice of his court, telling him that he was more needed at home than at war. Whatever the case may be, he hardly knew what to do with himself at times. David saw Bathsheba from his rooftop during a time he stayed home from battle. Because of David’s sin with Bathsheba, he found it even harder to discipline his wayward sons. Nathan, the prophet, told David, “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife” (2 Samuel 12:10).

David, a man after God’s own heart, and the greatest king Israel ever had, lived an eventful and blessed life—despite his failures and mistakes. He was quick to admit his faults and never blamed anyone else for his sins. He asked God for forgiveness and was graciously forgiven. All too soon his time on earth drew to a close.

As each season of life comes and goes, the Lord wants us to embrace what He has for us at that time, for we soon go on to the next phase in life, and then to our long home. Some do not finish what we regard as a full life, but depart early—sometimes very early.

“Dear Lord, Thank you for the life you loaned me that I might live for you. Help me to not be overly anxious about where I am in my ever changing life. Help me to live for you today and let you take care of the future. Teach me to number my days so that I might properly regard and appreciate the time you have given me. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

According to worldpopulationreview.com, roughly 166,000 men, women, boys, and girls of all ages die each day in the world. None of us know when that day will come for us. The memory verse, Psalm 90:12, gives very beneficial instruction to all of us. The wise choice is to get acquainted with God at a young age. If youth has passed you by, the wise choice is to get acquainted with God now. We are not promised a long life and even a long life (over 100 years?) is but a drop in the bucket compared to eternity. Tomorrow is not promised; we only have today. There are so many lessons we can learn from mistakes that others have made; those who did not make the right choices and whose clock has already stopped ticking. May God help us to use our numbered days wisely. In Evening Light Songs #397, verse 4, the songwriter wrote:

“Oh, souls, be up and doing, We have no time to lose, There’s life and death before us—Oh, which one will you choose? Then let us all take warning, And heed the Savior’s call, Be robed in white adorning, Then we’ll be ready, all.”

My we all be inspired by this stanza from a poem by Charles Thomas Studd:

*Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I’ll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.*

—Bro. Tavis Browne

NOVEMBER 19, 2023

YE KNOW NOT WHAT SHALL BE ON THE MORROW

Luke 12:16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build

greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Jas 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

MEMORY VERSE: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. —**Psalm 52:7**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The best way to live life is to not take it for granted. When God blesses us with reasonable health, material goods in any measure, and a sound mind, we should thank Him for it. Every one of these blessings would be gone in an instant if His great hand of protection drew back in the slightest. It is vain and foolish for anyone, rich or poor, to assume they will have another moment of life. It is wise to consider the possibility that the good things we enjoy in life will not always be there. One day, our appointment with the death angel will come, whether we are ready or not. We do well to include the Lord in all our hopes and plans for this life so that we will be ready for the life to come.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luk 12:20 “**Fool**”: mindless, stupid, ignorant, egotistic, rash, or morally unbelieving.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The rich man Jesus used in His parable in Luke 12 may have inherited much of his wealth. His father most likely inherited it from his father—going back several generations, clear back to the time God gave the land to Israel as an inheritance when they crossed the Jordan river about 1400 years earlier. True, each generation could have added to the wealth of the previous generation, but this happens often, even in today’s world.

Prior to Israel leaving Egypt on their journey to Canaan, they owned practically nothing. In fact, they were considered property themselves, having been slaves for many generations. In reality, then, the rich man in the parable would have had nothing in this world had God not delivered his ancestors from slavery years prior.

Regardless of whether a person inherits much of what they have or acquires it by hard work, that wealth is left to the next generation—every single bit of it. We can take nothing with us to the next world.

In the fourth chapter of James, we read of merchants that expand their wealth by buying and selling. Buying and selling can be an honorable way of expanding wealth, but when this is done without the consideration of our soul and the souls of others, God cannot bless it as He would like to.

Whether we have much or little in this world, we will leave it all to those who come after us. The only thing we take with us to the next life is our immortal souls. If we have allowed God to work in our lives and expand our capacity for spiritual things, it will be well with us in eternity. If, however, we have hindered the Lord’s work in our soul by concentrating too much on earthly things, how will it be for us in eternity?

DISCUSSION:

1. What made wealth a stumbling block for the rich man?
2. How should the rich man have viewed God’s blessings on his crops?
3. List a few of the things that could have caused the rich man’s crops to fail.
4. The rich man assumed he had a lot of time to enjoy his riches. How much time did he actually have?

5. How much time do any of us have to enjoy what God has blessed us with?
6. What is the main caution in James 4 regarding temporal things and what tomorrow holds?
7. Who controls what happens to us, our future, and our finances?
8. What kind of attitude allows God to bless us without having to war with our spirit regarding temporal blessings?
9. What does the phrase, “Lord willing” mean in our daily lives?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

R.G. LeTourneau (1888–1969) considered himself a “businessman for God.” He determined early in his business that he would live on 10% of his business earnings and give 90% to God. Mr. LeTourneau started business with meager earnings but ended up extremely wealthy—despite giving away most of what he earned year after year.

Before R.G. began giving 90% to the spread of the gospel, he was heavily in debt. His accountant thought he had lost his mind when he fulfilled a pledge of \$5000 for church missions, despite the large debt. The Lord blessed the business and started a new chapter.

The first years of R.G.’s business focused primarily on earth moving. He invented new machinery to speed up the normally back-breaking manual labor that had been the norm for centuries. He started selling some of his machinery at the end of each season. The breakthrough in his business came right after fulfilling the \$5000 pledge for missions. He started producing his machinery full-time. The rest is history. His business profits exploded. The net profits for 1932 was a little over \$52,000. In 1934, the net profit was \$340,000. By 1938, the net profit was \$1.4 million.

R.G. said, “It’s not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God’s money I keep for myself.” He also said, “I shovel out the money, and God shovels it back—but God has a bigger shovel.” It’s evident that R.G. did not make money his idol but chose to be trustworthy of what God blessed him with. (Information gleaned from www.giantsforgod.com and www.lmvfonline.org.)

“Heavenly Father, Thank you for your provision. You are faithful to supply all our needs. Help me to be faithful to honor you first in every decision I make, and let you bless me as you see fit. I know not what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds tomorrow! Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

When picking teammates while playing games as a youngster, we tried to pick people who had good traits for the particular game we were playing. It made sense to pick the bigger people for Red Rover, the fast and nimble for Dare Base, and good shooters for basketball.

For life in general, it is good to have friends who can be a help to us—and the most important friend we can ever have is God. One of His many awesome traits includes being able to see into the future. As humans, we are very limited in that area, and we often wish we could know better how to plan ahead and prepare for certain situations. Encouragingly, however, as God’s children, we have the privilege to pray and ask Him for things we need—including insight into the future. In His wisdom and sovereignty, He may not reveal many of the specifics to us, but because He has our good in mind, we can trust Him to guide us and grow us for what’s up ahead. He wants to do that—we need to seek Him for that.

I am reminded of the song, “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow,” by Ira Stanphill. Yes, there are many unknowns ahead of us that can be frightening, but it is comforting to know that we can connect to the One who not only knows all things, but who can also work in all things.

—Bro. Ronald Cole

NOVEMBER 26, 2023

THE HARVEST IS PAST AND WE ARE NOT SAVED

Matthew 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

MEMORY VERSE: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. —**Jeremiah 8:20**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus' parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins warns of the sad fate of those who postpone getting the necessary spiritual oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom, Christ, comes the second time, we will meet Him with what we have on hand at that moment. There will be no more opportunity to obtain what has been freely offered to all—mercy, pardon, and the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah, in chapter 8, lamented for the people in Jerusalem. It seemed that every opportunity for deliverance from the siege Nebuchadnezzar held against them had evaporated. God, in His wrath over their stubborn rebellion against Him, allowed them to be completely overthrown.

God has mercy on all mankind, hoping they will turn to Him. When His mercy and grace is put off long enough, however, the opportunity for redemption ceases. It is then that people sometimes come to the realization, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mat 25:1 **“Virgin”**: a maiden; an unmarried daughter.

Mat 25:2 **“Wise”**: thoughtful, sagacious, discreet, cautious, practical, intelligent.

Mat 25:2 **“Foolish”**: mindless, stupid, ignorant, egotistic, rash, or morally unbelieving.

Mat 25:4 **“Vessels with their lamps”**: separate pots containing oil to pour into their lamps when the oil in their lamps diminished.

Mat 25:5 **“While the bridegroom tarried”**: the time before a person’s death, or the time before the final judgement. (*Clarke*)

Mat 25:5 **“Slumbered and slept”**: The drowsiness that all the virgins experienced signifies sickness and incapacity proceeding literal or spiritual death. The implication is that all mankind is subject to slumber and drowsiness. (*Clarke*)

Mat 25:6 **“At midnight there was a cry made”**: Jewish weddings typically started when the evening star first appeared. In this instance, the bridegroom tarried until midnight, thus the drowsiness of ten virgins. The fact that Jesus has tarried thus far has given rise to many feeling spiritual drowsiness.

Mat 25:7 **“Trimmed their lamps”**: By burning their lamps until midnight, it became necessary to trim the wicks in order to give better light. This is similar to what happens when a person realizes they are close to death and they are not ready. (*Albert Barnes*)

Mat 25:8a **“Give us of your oil”**: The foolish wished to obtain from the wise that which only can be given by God. We cannot live off the experience of anyone else—much less go out into eternity with someone else’s salvation.

Mat 25:8b **“Lamps are gone out”**: The original reads, ‘are going out.’ This signifies that their lamps were once lighted, but they had backslid in their experience with God. (*Clarke*)

Mat 25:13 **“Watch”**: to keep awake; to be vigilant; to be employed chiefly about the business of our salvation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It was a custom among the Jews to have at least ten witnesses for important events, such as holding a synagogue service, circumcision,

keeping of the Passover, and marriage. In the case of a marriage ceremony, there were usually ten virgins attending the bride. The bridegroom usually came to get his bride late at night. As the bridegroom approached, the ten virgins would go out into the street with their lamps to escort him into the bride.

The ten virgins are likened to those professing Christ as their Savior. They wait for the coming bridegroom. Time will tell who among the waiting virgins are wise and who are foolish. Only the wise will take heed to have enough oil in their vessels to last until He comes. Perhaps if the bridegroom had only come earlier, all of the virgins might have had sufficient oil, but the bridegroom tarried to see who would truly be faithful to the end—no matter how long the delay.

The prophet Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet for good reason. God's chosen people had repeatedly chosen their own way over God's way—to the point of their destruction. In Jeremiah 8 we read where the prophet foretold the carnage and barbarity the Chaldeans would perform on the Jews once the siege against Jerusalem had accomplished its purpose. Jeremiah 8:1-3 tells of when the Chaldeans would eventually "bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth."

DISCUSSION:

1. What one thing seems to differentiate the five wise virgins from the five foolish virgins?
2. What does the oil in the parable of the ten virgins represent?
3. The fact that all ten were virgins implies what?
4. When did the virgins expect the bridegroom to come?
5. When the bridegroom delayed his coming, what did all of the virgins do, and why?

6. How is Christ's second coming likened to the coming of a bridegroom to a wedding?
7. In the parable, when the bridegroom finally came, why was it too late to get more oil?
8. Why will it be too late to get "more oil" when Christ comes again?
9. When Jeremiah lamented, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved," why did he feel in his spirit that time had run out for the Jews?
10. How did Jeremiah's prophecy come to pass?
11. We are warned in the scriptures that the end of life will come to everyone, and that the end of time will come for this world. What does the devil try to trick people into thinking in regard to these two facts?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As the mile-long BNSF freight train rumbled along, John's mind ran over the last few hours. It had been an uneventful run thus far. A few more hours would complete their shift. At that moment, the train entered a blind curve as they started a long gradual uphill grade. To their left, a nearby bank zipped by. To their right, the terrain dropped rapidly away. This treacherous stretch was disdained by John, the engineer. If anything was amiss up ahead, they could never see it in time to stop; however, they could not slow down without good cause because they would lose valuable momentum which would be next to impossible to regain. Furthermore, he risked breaking the train apart if he did try to speed up again on a grade. They simply had to keep going and trust that nothing was awry up ahead. As he was thinking along these lines, a small voice spoke to John, "Start slowing down...." "It's funny," John mused, "Start slowing down? That's crazy! Everyone knows you don't slow down here—it would practically be suicide!" Yet, the voice persisted—"Start slowing down!"

"Well, here goes," John muttered, as he began easing the throttle lever back. "I don't know why I'm doing this, but somehow I know I have to start slowing down...." "John! What are you doing? Why are you slowing down here, of all places? You know we don't do that on a grade," shouted the conductor. "Yeah, I know, but we are today," John retorted, "I don't really know why we are either, but we are...."

As John replied to the conductor, they both were finally able to see around the bend and see that one of the rails was curled up into the air—ramping up away from the cross ties. John immediately put the freight train into emergency stop mode. As the bang, bang, bang of heavy cars slamming against one hitch after another rippled back through the train, John and his conductor willed the train to stop in time. “Please, God, help this beast to stop,” muttered John. The conductor practically did a jig, knowing what would happen if their engine went up the ramp.

Praise God! The train stopped a few feet shy of the broken rail. John and the conductor climbed down from their engine with shaking knees and thankful heart. They walked the short distance to the break. They could see where several spikes had worked themselves loose. The previous train must have found a weak spot—a place where a few spikes had become loose. As one car after another rumbled past, the those spikes got looser. A few spikes came completely out, starting a curling effect to the rail. The quick succession of steel wheels running over the break kept the rail from curving high enough to cause a derailment, but as soon as the last car had passed, the loose end sprang up to its present height.

“Wow! exclaimed the conductor. “How in the world did you know, John?” “You tell me,” John replied, “But I know ‘someone’ who probably does,”—referring to his praying mother. They both walked back to the engine to report what had just happened. This eventful day was going to be very long, but it could have been the last one for both of them if John hadn’t listened to that still, small voice.

It is God’s will that everyone be saved from eternal death. He warns each man, woman, and child to turn from their sins and repent—before it is eternally too late. Some listen and are saved. Some refuse to listen, believing that they know best, even though they cannot see around the blind curve.

“Dear Lord, Help me to listen to your still, small voice that warns of danger ahead. Help me to always heed the dealings of your Holy Spirit so that I will not be among those who say at the end, “The harvest is past and we are not saved! Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

There is a time and season for all things. In some climates the planting, growth, and harvest seasons are not so long. When the season or time arrives, there is no time for delay, no time for excuses. You cannot delay the times for planting or growth. You cannot casually choose when to harvest after plants have reached their peak in bearing fruit and maturity.

In reference to man, there are times to meet and be dealt with by God. We are to listen and reason with him. Such opportunities are truly precious. They are not to be taken lightly. To go through the various seasons of life, yet ignoring or passing by promptings of God, only to lose out in the end, is a tremendous, terrible waste.

No doubt the five wise virgins were observed by the five foolish, as they carried extra oil for their lamps. Each one of us have observed others who made and maintained their preparations in order to meet God in due time, laboring, seeking, and asking for His graces in order to avoid that awful, eternal end—"He knows me not and I am shut out of heaven forevermore."

Harvest includes time, growth, and maturity. It implies sufficient time for each phase of life. It calls for cultivating, nurturing, and feeding physically and spiritually. Failure to be saved implies neglect, spiritual laziness, avoidance and sometimes refusal to expend the effort to yield and follow the Lord.

How blessed it is to be able to say, the summer is past (*my life on earth*), the harvest is ended (*I'm gathered in His home*), and now I AM SAVED!

—Bro. Paul Phillips

DECEMBER 3, 2023

GOD SHUT THE DOOR

Genesis 6:13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

14 Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in

the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

Genesis 6:17 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

Genesis 7:5 And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

6 And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

7 And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood.

8 Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,

9 There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

10 And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

12 And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

13 In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;

14 They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.

15 And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.

16 And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.

MEMORY VERSE: He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. —**Revelation 22:20**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God destroyed the earth with a flood, saving only Noah and his family. A select representation of land-dwelling creatures accompanied Noah and his family into the safety of the ark. On the day of the flood, “the LORD shut him in.” The moment the door closed, the fate of all the rest of mankind was forever sealed. More than enough time and opportunity had been given to the world to repent and enter the ark, but that all ended when the door closed. When God destroys the earth the second time, it will be complete destruction with immeasurable heat. The end will come quickly, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” Mankind will be carrying on their daily lives, but suddenly, the door of time will close forever. All opportunity of getting right with God will be past.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Gen 7:16 “**The LORD shut him in**”: God shut the door of the ark to keep the floodwaters out. He sealed Noah and his family in, while all the rest of mankind was sealed out—forever.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the years it took Noah to build the ark, God continued to call out to mankind. Noah is called “a preacher of righteousness” in 2 Peter 2:1. The crowds that gathered to watch as the ark took shape wondered at the strange words of the man who was building something never built before—a huge “ark.” It had never rained before. Flooding was non-existent. Yet Noah warned of both events happening soon. God would send rain and the whole earth would be overwhelmed with floodwaters. Everyone that chose not to get on the ark would perish.

We read in 2 Peter 3:3-4 that, “There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” The end of time has been prophesied for generations, warning all to repent and “get in the ark” of God’s salvation. Some listen, but, sadly, many do not.

DISCUSSION:

1. Once the ark construction was complete, how many ways were there in and out of the ark? Why did God plan it that way?
2. What significance does question 1 have regarding our salvation from sin?
3. When did God close the door of the ark relative to the time it started raining?
4. Before God closed the door of the ark, people could go in and out of the ark at will. How does this relate to our free will today regarding sin and salvation?
5. For those who chose to remain outside of the ark, what could have been their thoughts once they realized the door of the ark was closed?
6. When the end of time comes, what will the thoughts be of those outside of the ark of God's salvation?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Our youngest daughter used to work at one of our local banks. My wife and I are acquainted with all of the staff on a first name basis. One evening, very close to 5 p.m., I tried to make a transaction at the drive-through window. The teller informed me, "Cliff, I'm sorry, but the computer system is shut down for the evening. I can't enter the transaction." While she felt sorry for my plight, there was absolutely nothing she could do to remedy the situation. I had arrived soon enough to send the check through to her, but there was not enough time left to complete the transaction. I had no other choice but to try another day—but a little earlier in the day.

When the trumpet sounds at the end of all time, Jesus will not be able to roll the clock back even a milli-second. Those who procrastinated up until that point will no longer have a chance to "cash the check" of having their sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. Likewise, for all who die before the end of time, their individual "end-of-time" will have arrived. Their soul will forever be sealed in the exact state it left this world—either in the presence of God or in the abject absence of God.

"Heavenly Father, Thank you for your mercy and goodness to me! Help me to not procrastinate when your Holy Spirit deals with my

soul. May I always remember that the time to do business with you is when you are trying to do business with me—not when there is no longer time and opportunity to do so. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

*Thy conscience, once so keen to feel
That voice sent to reprove,
No more is stirred at God's appeal
To seek His pard'ning love. (ELS#394)*

The souls of Noah's day had rejected God's call so often that they did not even respond when the animals miraculously entered the ark without human compulsion. Christ has set before us an open door that someday He will shut because only He has the power to open or close our day of opportunity. Behold, now is the day of our salvation. Don't let the day of his grace be past for you. Enter into the ark of safety now because the procrastinator's, "Some day I will respond" will never come.

*Some day, yes, when forever
The mercy door is closed,
And your lost soul must suffer
Amid eternal woes,
In bitter grief and anguish
You'll think upon the day,
When trifling with God's mercy,
You, careless, said, "Some day."*

God help us to daily agonize and vehemently strive to enter the strait gate because many will seek but will not be able to enter. Only by listening and heeding to His still small voice, will we be able to enter into the marriage feast with Him instead of being eternally shut out with many of our long-time friends in Christ who let their oil run out.

*Some day when God's fierce anger
Falls on this world of sin,
You'll knock as did the virgins,
But cannot enter in.*

*Ah, then, with bitter weeping,
From those fair gates of light
You'll go with other doomed ones,
Down to an awful night. (ELS #462)*

—Bro. Jeremy Booher

DECEMBER 10, 2023

TIME SHALL BE NO LONGER

Revelation 10:1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

2 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,

3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,

6 And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:

Revelation 6:14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

2 Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. — **Revelation 1:7**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Lord gave the Apostle John a glimpse of what the end of time will be like. Peter also had a revelation of the end. In the accounts of both John and Peter, time ends suddenly. Luke 21:35 also tells us, “For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.” In each account of Scripture that deals with the end of time, we find there will be no more chance to make things right. Those who are not right will make no attempt to get right but will only long for an opportunity to escape God’s wrath—which will be made fully manifest at that last moment of time.

WORD DEFINITIONS

2 Pe 3:10 **“Day of the Lord”**: the day Jesus returns for His second coming.

2 Pe 3:10 **“Thief in the night”**: unexpectedly; suddenly.

2 Pe 3:10 **“Heavens shall pass away”**: earthly atmosphere.

2 Pe 3:10 **“With a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”**: When God brings an end, all of the elements that are formerly separated will turn against each other and simply be fuel for a sudden and tremendous fire. The ignition of this fire will be instantaneous and tremendous. (*Condensed from Adam Clarke*)

LESSON BACKGROUND

God does not need time. He refers to Himself as “I am that I am” in Exodus 3:14. We are the ones dependent on time and are limited

by all of the parameters of time. When God chooses to end creation, as we know it, He will also call an end to time. Time will no longer exist but eternity will continue on.

DISCUSSION:

1. What similarities do the various descriptions of the end of time have?
2. How much time will people have to get ready for eternity when the end of time comes?
3. When “the great day of his wrath is come,” who will be able to stand?
4. What is held back and “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment”?
5. Why is the “Day of the Lord,” or the end of time, compared to “a thief in the night”?
6. Why did God design the end of time to be sudden and final?
7. How much room does a sudden and final end of time give for a “second chance” of salvation?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

I had a dream several years ago about the end of time. It is stamped on my consciousness to this day. I hope and pray I never forget it, lest I lose the benefit I so desperately need from what I gleaned from it.

When the end of time came in my dream, I was extremely busy—busier than I ever imagined I could be. It was during this time of being so caught up with the things “that had to be done” that I realized in a flash that it was all over. The end of time had come. I was to meet God just as I was at that moment. I woke up and realized that it was a dream, but I also had a new awakening to the seriousness of the end of time. IT IS sudden!

As most of us could probably testify, we are all so busy. Speaking for myself, I have never had more on my plate than I do now. There could be various explanations and excuses for being so encumbered, but the fact still remains, the end will come—and it will most likely come to all of us when it is not convenient or expected.

Should our earthly existence come to an end before the end of time comes, our end will still be final. In a more recent experience, I came down with an extremely violent form of intestinal problems. The pain and discomfort woke me around 3 a.m. As I sat on the edge of the bed wondering what to do, I soon realized in my inner consciousness that I was traveling through a dark tunnel. After a few minutes I awoke with my wife calling my name. I had passed out and fallen backwards onto my wife who until that moment was soundly asleep in bed. I sat up again, not able to think as clearly as I would have liked because of the discomfort and nausea I was experiencing. One thought did keep coming to me, though: "I am in no shape to pray right now. If I have a need of getting something right before God, I don't know if I can think clearly enough to do so at this time."

There are many accounts of last moment conversions and death-bed experiences of salvation. I am so grateful for those who do find grace at the end of their earthly existence. There are also many, unfortunately, that go out into eternity without the chance of a last-minute prayer. There is only one thing we can do to make certain we are not caught short-handed at our end. We can repent right now, while we are in a clear frame of mind and before we run out of time.

"Heavenly Father, Thank you for the moment of time you have loaned me right now. Help me, in the time I still have, to make certain I am clear before you. If there is anything I need to make right with you, or with anyone else, help me to do it as soon as possible. Amen"

REFLECTIONS

The disciples came to Jesus privately, saying, "Tell us ... what shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?" This question has been an age-old curiosity. The words of Christ, as well as prophecies in Daniel and by John the Revelator, gave signs of the end of the world; therefore, there have been many speculations as to the second coming of Christ.

I remember at the turn of this century, there were many speculations that the end of time would possibly happen on January 1, 2000. I shall never forget the very large and dark headlines of the Daily Oklahoman on January 1st —AND TIME GOES ON! There have been those who have predicted the end. Yet, those who knew the truth were never moved because, "...of that day and

that hour knoweth no man,....neither the Son, but the Father.”

Bro. Isaac Chandler brought the concluding portion of a service in the Pacoima, California camp meeting in 1967. He said, “I can tell you when the world will come to an end. The world is going to come to an end when the world is so wicked that God’s people cannot bear it any longer—they just won’t be able to stand it! When the wickedness of this world reaches this high proportion, the saints of God in the four quarters of the earth will be pleading—pleading for the mercies of God to help them survive. That’s when God won’t stand it any longer (either), for there will be a universal moaning all over the world, at which time God will leave his throne as a mediator. He will split the clouds wide open! Every eye shall see Him—THEN there will be no need to pray!”

Jesus said in Revelation 22:20, “Surely, I come quickly.” John’s response was, “Even so come, Lord Jesus.”

—Sis. Maxine Busbee

DECEMBER 17, 2023

ETERNITY WITH OR WITHOUT GOD?

Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

MEMORY VERSE: And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

— **Luke 16:26**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar, is one of the most descriptive accounts in Scripture of eternity with God and eternity without God. Lazarus had a difficult life, but after death he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Eternity for Lazarus meant complete peace, comfort, safety, and contentment. Everything was absolutely perfect. The rich man, however, had the exact opposite experience. In his earthly life, he had more than enough to satisfy every whim of his flesh. When he found himself in hell, however, he was in perpetual torment. He was able to compare his present sufferings with Lazarus' contentment. He was able to communicate enough with Abraham to receive answers that only increased his suffering. His memory was sharp, filling him with regret and utter remorse. He asked for a single drop of water to cool his tongue but was refused. Finally, when he begged for Lazarus to return from the dead to warn his brothers, he was reminded that mankind generally does not respond to miracles such as he requested.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 16:22 **“Carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom”**: The Jews considered Abraham the father of their religion. It was believed that if one were to be able to be in Abraham's presence in the afterlife it meant they would be enjoying Heaven. (*Albert Barnes*)

Luke 16:26 **“Great gulf”**: chasm or vacancy; impassable interval.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Jewish religious rulers continually referred to themselves as “Abraham's seed.” They believed that having Abraham in their lineage automatically earned them eternal life in Heaven. The religious elite also believed their position gave them insight over who would make it to heaven and who would not. Jesus tried on numerous occasions to point out to them the fallacy of their belief system. In almost every point of their strongly held tenants, the Jewish rulers believed exactly opposite of what God actually longed for in His people: God wanted humility, not arrogance; simplicity rather than multiple layers of complicated rigidity; forgiving spirits instead of malice toward those who crossed their belief system; and a relationship with God instead of mere religion.

DISCUSSION:

1. Hell will be terrible if it only includes complete isolation from God. How much more horrible will it be, however, if souls are able to communicate their desperation—and then are refused over and over again?
2. How much torment will it be for someone who realizes they could have been saved but are instead continually reminded throughout eternity of the many times they refused God's grace?
3. Why was it grievous to the rich man to realize there was nothing that could be done to warn his brothers of their future torment in hell if they refused to listen to the prophets?
4. Pain and sorrow in this life are only temporary for a child of God. Why is it that way?
5. Earthly and fleshly pleasures in this life are only temporary for the unsaved. How is this so?

6. Why are the truths in the above two statements seemingly hid from the consciousness of those who do not want to hear the truth?
7. Compare how powerful the regret will be for those who miss heaven to how thankful those will be who make heaven?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

A few years ago, I received a phone call from an organization that offers certification in the field in which I am employed. After reflecting and praying about the opportunity, I decided to sign up for the test that was to take place later that year. After signing up for the test, I was given a list of publications and books I needed to obtain to take with me to the test site. I purchased the study/reference material and readied myself as best as I could for the eight-hour test. When I walked into the testing facility, approximately eight other participants were already seated. The testing proctor went over the rules for the test. He assured us that every question on the test had an answer in the recommended resource material that we were to bring to the test site; however, we could not use any other source, electronic or otherwise, for obtaining answers other than those on the pre-approved list.

About three hours into the test, a young man strode up to the proctor, smiled, shook his hand, and exited the room. I watched the young man leave the room, thinking, "Wow! He's pretty good to finish the test this soon. I'm not even halfway done!" I silently prayed again for the Lord to help me through the test and to utilize what time I had left. I could already tell that I was going to need all eight hours! Not long after the first young man finished, a second, and then a third person got up and repeated the actions of the first. They all smiled and shook the proctor's hand, thanking him for the opportunity of taking the test. I looked at the clock, then back at my test. "I don't know what is wrong with me, but it is not going as well as it appears it went with these other folks," I muttered.

By early afternoon, there was no one left in the room but the proctor and me. He read a book, busied himself with his phone, then gazed out of the window while I sweated it out on the test. I prayed several times as I noticed the clock creeping towards the 5 p.m. deadline. I finally came to the conclusion that I had done the very

best I could. Shortly before the deadline, I hit the "submit" button on the computer screen, gathered my box of reference material, and bid the proctor good evening. I also thanked him for putting up with me for so long after all the others had left. He assured me it was no problem and thanked me for participating in the program.

The large exhibit hall for the trade show related to the certification program was next door. I decided to walk through it while waiting for my wife to join me. Not long after I started toward the exhibit hall, I received a text stating, "Congratulations! You passed the test!" I thanked God for helping me and continued on my way. Shortly after receiving the text, I met a group of men that had left the test rather early in the day. I mentioned to them that I had received notification of my test results. They looked at one another, then replied that they had not heard back on their test results. I wondered what the delay might mean for them. I met a few other test takers after that and discovered that they had not received notification either. Thinking back over this event, a possible explanation for why the other test takers had not received immediate notification of their results was because we could retake up to two out of the five sections of the test at a later date if we did not pass the first time. It probably took some time to analyze what sections of the test would be best to retake for each participant that did not pass. A letter or e-mail then had to be written and sent off to everyone that failed. This process would take time, explaining the delay in the notification process.

There are several analogies comparing the test we took to the last great judgment day:

It was an "open book" test. Our eternal test is also "open book," with the Bible being our only source material. No other book will work for our final exam. We are warned ahead of time not to even consider any other book, but, sadly, many in this world insist that other sources should be allowed.

The test takers were invited and encouraged to participate in the certification test. God's will is that everyone be saved. (1Ti 2:4)

Anyone that did not pass the test the first time could retake up to two sections of the test. Spiritually speaking, when we fall short in a certain area, God is faithful to "retest" us in that weakness until it becomes a strength. He really wants us to succeed! (Phil 3:15b)

In the end, it doesn't pay to quit early because we don't want to look bad in the eyes of others. It matters not what we think of each other, despite the temptation to compare ourselves among ourselves. (2Co 10:12)

There was pressure put on the "slow test takers" by those who left early. Speaking for myself, I felt pretty foolish for being the last one there, but I am thankful I stayed as long as necessary. At the end of life, I will be so glad I went the distance. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Mat 10:22b).

It is hard to replicate the good feeling and thankful heart I had when I read the text, "You passed"! I desperately want to hear from Jesus, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Mat 25:21)!

"Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for your plan of salvation, and for the hope and promise of eternal life! Thank you for inviting me to enjoy salvation now, and heaven in the end. Help me to remember that your Holy Word is the only Book allowed at that last great day. I will not be judged by any other thought or opinion found outside of your word. Help me to be faithful to accept that truth. Amen"

REFLECTIONS

I'm reminded of some counsel that my grandpa gave my mother or another of his children before they were married. He said, "It can be a long time, in the case that you both live." Marriage is the closest thing to eternity that we have on this earth. Scripture teaches us that marriage is for life. If we—the young man and young woman—both seek the Lord for direction before getting married, and if we both keep our hearts in tune with God throughout life; marriage can be a blessed state. If any other variables come into play, marriage can be torment here on earth. Marriage has a time limitation, the lifespan of at least one of the spouses.

A lot of sports put time on a "clock" for each section of the competition. When the clock counts down to zero, the buzzer sounds and all the contestants know that time has run out. Whether humanity faces the clock of time counting down to zero individually or collectively, we will all come to eternity where time is no more. Our spiritual state will be sealed with no opportunity for recourse or alteration. Our state of tranquility or enmity with God will continue without interruption, without any termination. Time will not be a

factor. Remember, eternity has no time limitations. The song says, *“Be very sure, be very sure, your anchor holds and grips the solid rock!”*

—Bro. Dan Adams

DECEMBER 24, 2023

THE TIMING OF JESUS’ BIRTH

Malachi 4:1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

MEMORY VERSE: 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 for ever.

— **Daniel 2:44**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God had a plan from the beginning of time to redeem mankind from sin. What would have been the fate of man had Jesus not come when He did? The last phrase of the last verse in the Old Testament tells us, “...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:6b).

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mal 4:1 **“Day that cometh”**: referring to both the first and second coming of Jesus.

Mal 4:5 **“Elijah the prophet”**: John the Baptist.

Mal 4:6 **“Smite the earth with a curse”**: God smote the earth the first time with a flood. He will smite the earth the second time with a consuming fire.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There is roughly a four hundred-year interval from the end of the Old Testament to the coming of Jesus. This span of time is known as the four hundred years of silence, because there were no additional prophecies recorded during this time. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, broke the long silence. He helped usher in the day of grace, the day of the LORD.

Had Jesus not come when He did, there is a strong likelihood that the four hundred years of silence would have extended until He did come. Would the world have only grown worse for the wait? We will never know for sure because, thank God, Jesus did come – just at the right time! He is never late.

DISCUSSION:

1. What might be some of the reasons God was silent for four hundred years before Jesus' birth?
2. What did God promise for those who feared His name?
3. What three important things did God want His people to remember during the four hundred years of silence and why?
4. What was the general condition of the world at the time of Jesus' birth?
5. Describe what it was like to be a Jew at the time of Jesus' birth.
6. How was it beneficial for John the Baptist to come shortly before Jesus started His ministry?
7. There are three main possibilities regarding “timing”: too early, on time, and too late. Looking back over history, how would you describe the timing of Jesus' birth and ministry?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Toyota, one of the largest car manufacturers in the world, perfected “*Just in Time Manufacturing*,” also known as JIT. The theory behind JIT is that all parts are manufactured and delivered just in time for them to be delivered to the assembly line, in the exact quantity needed to fulfill the orders for the assembly line. This eliminates large warehouses and huge stockpiles of parts, reducing the cost of manufacturing. Toyota used JIT for several years with great success, until the recent COVID pandemic started interrupting the supply chain and manufacturing process. JIT is extremely efficient and cost-effective, as long as nothing goes seriously wrong. It usually works out well until the inevitable happens.

Regarding the events of the world, spanning all of the centuries, does God have the ability to choreograph all events and make it part of His master plan? How does the fact that God gives man a free will impact God’s overall design for man? The answer to these two questions is largely impacted by God’s ability to foresee the results of man’s actions in every circumstance. God inspired His prophets all down through the ages with prophecies of every major event that has taken place—with 100% accuracy. Very few prophecies remain unfulfilled. Some of the near-the-end prophecies are being fulfilled at this very moment.

The fact that God is never surprised by anything and has the ability to instantly foreknow the end result of every decision made by every human that has ever lived—or will live—gives God the ability to do everything “*just in time*.” God’s planning is impeccable and infallible. We can trust His timing in every circumstance.

God sent His Son into the world in the middle of a very dark period in history, but it was timed perfectly. The fact that most of the world was under Roman rule when Jesus was born does not mean that He came too late. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5)

“Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of your Son—our only hope for salvation and eternal life! Thank you for your perfect timing in all things. Help me to trust you in all things, knowing you have my eternal good in mind. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

Down through history God has decreed that certain events should occur at a certain time and they came to pass at the time appointed. For instance, God told Abraham that his descendants wouldn't inherit Canaan for 400 years until "...the iniquity of the Amorites..." was full (Genesis 15:13-16). True to His word, the children of Israel left Egypt and headed for the land of Canaan exactly when God had promised Abraham (Exodus 12:41).

"...When the fulness of the time was come..." It may have taken a few millennia to send Jesus to earth as promised in the Garden of Eden, but it was done just in time. Even more astoundingly, God has often revealed His timing to others! While several prophets were told Messiah was coming, God revealed to Daniel with divine accuracy the timing of His arrival! Bible historians consider it likely that the wise men were quite familiar with Daniel's writings and used them as the basis of their search for Jesus.

As a Master Planner, similar to a world-champion chess player, God sees all moves and decisions made by mankind and satan and is able to still accurately navigate His plan. I am reminded of a phrase from the song "Right On Time God" that our family used to sing together, speaking of God: "...He's never late, but seems to wait, for the time that is just right..." Aren't you glad we serve such an all-wise Creator?

—Bro. Fari Matthews

DECEMBER 31, 2023

HAVE WE ANY TIME FOR JESUS?

Haggai 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,
4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

MEMORY VERSE: And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

—Acts 24:25

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The LORD reminded His people that they needed to start working again on rebuilding the temple. They had been stopped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by decree of Artaxerxes, but the decree did not necessarily apply to the temple—yet the people used the decree as an excuse to stop work on the temple. While the temple project languished, the people built their own private dwellings and continually said, “The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.”

The devil cares not how much we work on our own secular projects, as long as we put forth little or no effort in the kingdom of God for ourselves or for others. The Lord sees when this takes place

and tries to correct it in every way possible. In the case of the Jews coming back from captivity, He wanted them to concentrate on rebuilding His house, instead of working on their own dwellings to the point of excluding His house. God could not bless their temporal efforts because of their neglect. Neither can He bless our temporal efforts today as much as He would like if we neglect doing our little part for our own soul's welfare and for the souls of others. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Ti 4:14).

WORD DEFINITIONS

Hag 1:2b **"This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built."**: The people were postponing the rebuilding of the temple because of the hinderances to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They also assumed that since it had only been sixty-nine years instead of seventy years toward the fulfillment of the prophecy to return to Jerusalem, that it gave them license to postpone work on the temple—even though they continued working on their private dwellings.

Hag 1:6, 9-11 **"Ye have sown much, and bring in little"**: The LORD hindered every good thing He would have loved to bless—all in an effort to turn His people around in their habit of fulfilling and gratifying their fleshly lusts ahead of doing His will.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Sixteen years before the LORD sent word by Haggai the prophet to the people, Cyrus had given permission, along with the initial funds, for the temple to be rebuilt. Cyrus encouraged the Jews to contribute through free-will offerings and their own labor. After laying the foundation, the work was hindered by a group of the Jews' enemies who wrote a letter to the new king, Artaxerxes, claiming it was dangerous to his kingdom to allow the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Interestingly enough, these enemies did not mention the rebuilding of the temple but work on the temple did stop for a while anyway. The devil uses any device he can to either stop or hinder God's work, even if it is through the power of suggestion. Thankfully, God's people did take courage again, as is evidenced in

the book of Ezra, and they continued with the rebuilding of the temple.

DISCUSSION:

1. What was the LORD's opinion concerning the delay in the rebuilding of the temple?
2. Why did He feel the way He did?
3. Why did the LORD bring the houses His people built for themselves into the conversation?
4. The LORD told His people to consider their ways. What all were they to consider?
5. What did the LORD say He had been doing to His people's crops in the field, their stored crops, their cattle, the labor of their hands, their health, and their money?
6. The LORD waited several years for His people to start work on the temple again before He sent a prophet to explain to them why they had been having such difficulty these many years. Why did He wait for several years? What could He have possibly been hoping for?
7. Describe how the LORD often deals with people today regarding their procrastination in getting saved, or in getting serious about doing what God wants them to do in His kingdom?
8. How much better off would God's people have been had they simply done what they knew they needed to do without making excuses for their procrastination?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Occasionally, I have picked up young children just high enough so their feet would clear the ground, then tell them to run. No matter how hard and fast they move their legs, they can't go anywhere. They have fun at first, but they usually grow weary of it rather quickly when they go nowhere despite all their effort.

I don't know if the children get much of a lesson out of this little exercise, but I remember times in life my feet seemed to be held off the ground. These times were very confusing, until I got serious enough before the Lord to find out what was really happening. Does the Lord do this just to have fun with us and to prove how much

bigger He is than we are? Or does He do it out of a heart full of love, with the understanding of what eternity is really like for those who choose their own way and miss the mark?

I have found it is much better to be sure what the mind of the Lord is before I start making decisions in any given circumstance. When my priorities are where they should be, the Lord often blesses beyond what I can even imagine. There have been times that I said “yes” to what the Lord wanted me to do, despite the realization that it would be a sacrifice of time for other necessary activities. Somehow, the Lord more than made up the time I gave Him. I don’t know how He does it, but it is wonderful anyway!

One special blessing happened several years ago. My wife had been afflicted for over a year. She finally went for simple testing, knowing that dietary changes that might help one problem could be counterintuitive if the illness proved to be another. We found out, however, that the problem was much more serious—likely life threatening. This news brought me to a very difficult place. I lay awake all that night, praying. It was not easy to consecrate my wife to life or death, but the Lord was faithful to comfort me. Not long after, I felt burdened to attend a revival meeting over eight hours away. After the Lord put the meeting on my heart, I prayed about it for several hours that Saturday morning. Everywhere I turned to read in the Bible, the verses seemed to say, “Go to the meeting”! No matter where I read—from Genesis to Revelation, I got the same message loud and clear. I finally told my wife what the Lord was telling me to do. She knew it was from the Lord but explained that she did not have time to get herself and our daughters ready for the trip since the meeting ended the next day. I quickly packed my bags and made it to the meeting for the final day of services. A day or two after I arrived home, my wife told me, “Honey, I don’t hurt anymore. The Lord has healed me!” After over a year of my wife having constant pain, all I can conclude is that the Lord healed her simply because I said “yes” to the Lord’s bidding that I attend the meeting.

“Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the times you have held my feet off of the ground for a while. Thank you, also, for the times you have blessed abundantly when I responded to your call. Help me to be faithful to your still, small voice. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

Several years ago I was at a family reunion. These affairs don't happen every year and sometimes it's not possible for me to attend, so I was especially enjoying being with everyone. There's always music at our family reunions, with my dad and others playing guitars and singing for a couple of hours or more. Though I don't play, it's my favorite part. This particular reunion was being held at a community center with a walking track, and just as the guitars were coming out, I thought I would take a quick walk. I was sure that I had plenty of time to enjoy the music when I got back, but I was wrong. By the time I returned, they were putting the guitars away and I had missed the whole thing.

How often do we miscalculate the time we have? Sometimes the opportunity that we missed cannot be recovered. Since we are bound by the limits of time, how do we balance "time" between temporal and spiritual needs? As a young mother I was given this advice: do the most important thing first and then the next most important thing, etc. Following this order, we make the best choices. Whether we are spending time in worship, fulfilling our daily duties, serving others, or caring for our own needs, we can do it all as unto the Lord.

—Sis. Sarah L. Herron

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