

Galatians - Commentaries by Paul Wilson

Prophetic Terms, Prophetic Terms: The Fullness of Time (4:4-5)

We are living in important times, in days when great changes are taking place throughout the world. It is a time of upheaval, and besides that, the world is on the threshold of even greater events. Many men of the world are perplexed and fearful as to the future. No one can look forward five, ten, or twenty years with any calm. The international waters are troubled, and there are many explosive elements that cause a sober man to fear.

Now in the midst of scenes of confusion, some men prophesy of greater and better times to come. Many have schemes for the improvement and betterment of mankind. Panaceas are offered, tried, and then discarded, but apprehension grows.

Fellow-Christian, this is a time when we should seek to have God's thoughts, and not man's, as to the present evil world and its future. There is only one Book in the whole world that can tell the future, and yet how very few Christians there are who understand much of what it says. Surely God has given us the prophetic word as a lamp in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19), and we do well to take heed to it.

It would be impossible to give any comprehensive exposition of the prophetic word in these papers, but with the Lord's help we hope to consider some of the expressions and terms used in connection with prophecy. A clearer understanding of these terms should enable the young Christian to have a better outline of prophecy, and thereby to discern the character of the day in which we live. He should then be able to look forward with joyful anticipation to his own blest future, and view the scene around as God views it. To have God's thoughts about the world, and to understand more of what He has decreed regarding it, would tend to give us more calm and peace when we see the tendency to unrest, and to the shaking of everything heretofore considered stable. Then neither the false hopes of the false prophets of our days, who still preach peace, safety, and betterment; nor the cries of the pessimist who sees the undermining of everything solid, will affect us. We shall be able to look beyond the darkness, and enjoy even now the prospect of the things that cannot be moved.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Heb. 12:28.

"The Fullness of the Time"

It would be profitable to first consider a term used by God, which causes us to look backward, as it refers to the ushering in of the ground of all our blessing.

"But when the fullness 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." Gal. 4:4, 5.

The fullness of the time (singular) looks back over the four thousand years of man's history on the earth prior to the birth of Christ. During this time God was testing man in many successive ways. On man's part all the trials ended in sad and dismal failure. It mattered not in what way man in the flesh was tested, he came short and was found wanting.

The whole course of the Old Testament is a tale of failure. Think of the wonderful opportunity Adam and Eve had where all was fresh from the hand of God in the garden, yet they gave their ear to the deceiver and fell. Man in innocence was not proof against sin, when put to the test.

After fallen man was driven out from the presence of God, he soon filled the earth with violence and corruption (see Genesis 4 and 6). Lawlessness was so rampant, that God cleansed the earth with the flood, and made a fresh beginning in Noah and his family. Almost immediately failure came in, in Noah himself, and soon his posterity had "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Rom. 1:23. Idolatry, which had not been mentioned before the flood, became the rule.

Then God called Abraham out from among idolaters (Josh. 24:14) to walk with Him. He chose the seed of Abraham for His special people, and gave them every opportunity to serve Him. He treated them without the law and with the law; He gave them the priesthood and it failed; He sent them prophets and He gave them kings; but all is the same sad story of failure. If ever a natural people—man in the flesh—had a chance to bring forth fruit for God, the children of Israel had.

God likens them to a vineyard which He Himself planted, but which never bore fruit for Him who planted it. He looked for fruit, but there was none (Matt. 21:33-41; Psalm 80:8-13; Isa. 5:1-7). In Luke 20, after speaking of the lack of fruit He received from His vineyard, God says,

"What shall I do?"

It is as though He had come to an extremity. Every effort and every culture of natural man to bring forth fruit, had proved to be useless; and God asks, "What shall I do?" The decision is reached, and God answers His own question with,

"I will send My beloved Son: it may be they will reverence Him when they see Him." Luke 20:13.

And with this verse we come back to Gal. 4:4.

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." Blessed be God! He concluded that man could not bring forth fruit, and He ceased looking for it. He decided to act in the love and grace of His heart, and send His beloved Son.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son." 1 John 4:10.

We all know the answer to this expression of God's love. They cried, "Away with Him." They cast Him out! And God triumphed over their abounding wickedness, and made that blessed One to be an offering and sacrifice for sin. Yes, when man had done his very worst, God did His very best. What a story of love—divine love!—love that gave the dearest object of His heart for most unlovable objects. He sent His Son to redeem. He would bring us to Himself according to His love, but also in keeping with His holy character. His beloved Son must die—must bear our sins—if we were to be saved.

Galatians goes on to tell of being brought to God as "sons" with the Spirit of His Son in our hearts. O the depths of God's love and wisdom! Well may we look back to the "fullness of the time," and rejoice that we are not on probation, but if we believe on Him who was delivered for our offenses, we are saved and brought to God as sons.

Correspondence, Curse of the Law, The (3:13)

QUESTION: "Does Gal. 3:13—'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us'—apply to us Gentiles?"

ANSWER: The Galatian saints were Gentiles by nature, but after being saved they had listened to Judaizing teachers. They began simply by faith, but then sought to perfect their lives by keeping the law. This was a basic departure from the truth of the gospel, and the beloved Apostle takes them to task very sharply for having removed from the grace of Christ to another gospel, which was no gospel at all.

Paul takes up the case of Abraham and shows that the father of the Jews, and the one in whom they boasted, was blessed unconditionally with promises from God. The law was a condition or rule of life, imposed later—on the Jews, to prove their helplessness to answer to God's requirements. It caused sin to become exceeding sinful; that is, what they knew to be wrong by natural conscience became a transgression when the law forbade their doing it.

It was evident then that every Jew was under the curse, for anyone who did not obey the law was cursed. How then was a Jew to be free from the curse which he incurred by failure to keep the law? Simply by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ who had so identified Himself with them that He bore the curse of the broken law in His death. So Paul can add, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He is speaking strictly of the Jews here, and links himself with the believing Jews in the word "us."

But is grace not to flow out to the Gentiles? for they need salvation too, although they were never under the law. Immediately, the Apostle adds, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham [who was blessed apart from and before the law] might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." v. 14. The hanging on the tree then becomes the ground of blessing for poor Gentiles too. Then Paul concludes the point by saying, "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This "we" now embraces all, believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

If Christians put themselves under the law for a rule of life, or for any purpose whatsoever, they are putting themselves under the curse. And those who have the law as a rule of life, greatly lower the standard of walk, for we are identified with Christ and are to live to please Him. Those who thus walk, not only do the things which would have been required by the law, but far transcend legal requirements, and all is done as the willing service of love, not of duty.

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