

THE RIGHT TIME

- A. Introduction: We're working on a series about the Bible—what it is, its purpose, why (and how) we should read it, as well as why we can trust its contents. We have more to say in this lesson.
1. The purpose of the Bible is to reveal Almighty God and His plan of redemption so that we will trust the Lord for salvation from sin, corruption, and death. II Tim 3:15
 - a. When the first humans sinned, they brought corruption and death into this world. But God quickly began to unveil His plan to deliver humanity and the earth from sin and its consequences.
 1. The Lord promised that a Redeemer—the Seed of the woman—would one day come and undo the damage (Gen 3:15). The Seed is Jesus and the woman is Mary (Gal 3:16).
 2. Record keeping began early in the history of man, first through oral traditions and then with written documents. Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2
 - b. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors wrote what they saw and heard as God's plan unfolded and they saw His power and presence demonstrated in their lives. II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:21
 1. The writers didn't set out to write a religious book. They wrote to communicate and preserve vital information about God's plan and the coming Redeemer.
 2. The Bible is in large part a historical narrative, with much of it written by people who witnessed the events they recorded. Today, the sixty-six books that make up the Bible are divided into the Old Testament (written mostly in Hebrew) and the New Testament (written in Greek).
 3. When Bible documents are assessed with the same standards used to assess other ancient books, it stands up to the scrutiny. The Bible is a reliable historical document. Much of its content can be verified through secular records and archaeological evidence. It's not a book of myths.
 2. Early in the Bible record, the Lord identified the people group through whom the promised Seed would come, the descendants of Abraham. They grew into the nation of Israel (the Jewish people). Gen 12:1-3
 - a. The Old Testament is a record of their history up until 400 years before Jesus was born into this world. In addition to history, the Old Testament also has many prophecies about the coming Redeemer, as well as types and shadows.
 1. Types and shadows are real events and real people, but they picture or foreshadow something about the Redeemer—what He will be like and what He will do. The Passover is the best known picture (type or shadow) of redemption and the Redeemer. Ex 12-14; I Cor 5:7
 2. These prophecies and types were recorded in part so that people would recognize the Redeemer when He arrived and realize that He is the culmination of God's unfolding plan of redemption.
 - b. The New Testament is mainly a record of Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, and the resulting effects as Jesus' first followers went out to tell the world what He had done.
 3. In the last few lessons we outlined Israel's history up to 400 BC. The documents that make up the Old Testament were completed by that point and, for the next four centuries, God gave no more revelation.
 - a. Although the Lord was silent in the sense that He sent no more prophets or inspired more Scripture, He was at work providentially to bring the Redeemer to earth at the right time. Providence refers to the continual care God exercises over the universe He created. Ps 33:13-15
 1. Because God is Omniscient (All-knowing) and Omnipotent (All powerful) He knew what would happen in these years and used those events to serve His ultimate purpose for a family.
 2. The stage was being set for the Redeemer to come at the right time: When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time, and died for us sinners (Rom 5:6, NLT). When the right time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, subject to the law (Gal 4:4, NLT).
 - b. During those 400 years the land of Palestine (Israel) was under the control of foreign rulers. The Babylonian Empire was the first to conquer and control Israel (605 to 539 BC). They were followed by the Persians (539 to 331 BC), then the Greeks (330 to 63 BC), and lastly, Rome.

1. The Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great, made common or *koine* Greek the language of all his subjects in his vast empire (stretching from Greece to Egypt to the border of India). When the Romans took over those lands, they kept Greek as the common language of their empire.
 2. Rome built a reliable system of roads throughout its empire and protected sea lanes, and made travel and communication fairly easy over a large area (Britain to Africa to the Persian Gulf).
- c. Once Jesus was born, these factors set the stage for the rapid spread of the news that the Redeemer had come. In addition, the joining of multitudes of nations under one empire and language broke down barriers of race and religion and made the spread of new and different ideas easier.
- B. During these 400 years, Israel labored under foreign control. By the end of the 1st century BC, the Romans were picking the high priests for Israel, and had installed Herod the Great (an Edomite) as King of Israel. The Israelite people longed for a deliverer and, according to the Scriptures, the time of his coming was near.
1. Shortly before prophetic revelation ceased in 397 BC, God gave the prophet Daniel two amazing timelines as to when the promised Redeemer (deliverer, Seed) would arrive.
 - a. Dan 2:31-45—One timeline came from a dream Daniel interpreted for King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In the dream the king saw a metallic statue with a gold head, silver shoulders and arms, brass thighs, and legs made of iron with feet of clay mixed with iron. The statue was broken in pieces by a stone not cut with human hands. The stone became a mountain that filled all the earth.
 1. The Lord told Daniel the statue represented four great empires that will ultimately be replaced by God's everlasting kingdom. God said the gold head was Babylon (in power then).
 2. We know from the historical record that the Babylonian Empire was followed by the Persians, who were conquered by the Greeks, and Greece was followed by the Romans. According to the dream, the God of Heaven will set up His kingdom in the time of the fourth empire.
 - b. Dan 9:24-27—The other timeline came from the angel Gabriel when he delivered a message from God to Daniel in response to a prayer the prophet prayed.
 2. Daniel read in the Book of Jeremiah that Jerusalem would lay desolate for seventy years. (Babylon had destroyed the city and the prophet Jeremiah witnessed it). Daniel realized that the end of the seventy years was approaching. Jer 25:11-12
 - a. So Daniel began to pray, fast, and ask God for mercy and forgiveness for Israel's sin of idol worship. Gabriel appeared to Daniel and gave the prophet a much bigger answer about the future.
 1. Dan 9:23—Daniel...the moment you began praying, a command was given. I am here to tell you what it was, for God loves you very much (NLT).
 2. Dan 9:24—A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to put down rebellion, to bring an end to sin, to atone for guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy (NLT).
 - b. To get the full impact of Gabriel's message we have to clarify certain points. The Hebrew wording that is translated seventy sets of seven can mean seventy sets of seven weeks or years depending on the context. In this passage it means years or 70 X 7 years, which equals 490 years.
 1. Although Israel was soon going to return to their land, they would continue to experience the consequences of their sin—they will remain under foreign control for the foreseeable future.
 2. But, according to God's message given through Gabriel, when the Anointed One comes, sin will end, and forgiveness and everlasting righteousness will come. And, the words of the prophets will be fulfilled. In other words, at the end of that time, redemption will come.
 3. A form of the Hebrew word translated anoint (v24) is also translated Messiah in v25 and v26. Daniel was the first to use the term Anointed One for Jesus. (Christ is the Greek form of this Hebrew word.) To anoint means to consecrate or appoint to a special office such as king, priest, or prophet. (Jesus will hold or fulfill all of those positions.)

- c. Gabriel listed specific historical events that will take place in these 490 years, making it possible for us to count out the years in the historical record (many lessons for another day).
1. He said 490 years would begin when the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was issued. The historical records tell us when that happened (March 5, 444 BC). It also tells us when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to be crucified (March 30, AD 33)—483 years later.
 2. There is some disagreement among scholars over how to calculate these dates exactly because the calendar has been adjusted (reset) many times through the centuries (more lessons).
 - A. The point for us is that all the various methods of calculation put fulfillment of 483 years of Daniel's prophecy into the time of Jesus' first coming.
 - B. Seven years have not yet been fulfilled. We now know that those final seven years will be fulfilled just prior to Jesus' second coming. Remember, none of the Old Testament prophets were shown clearly that there would be two separate comings of the Messiah.
- C. Side note. Are you aware that time across the world today is marked by Jesus' coming? BC stands for before Christ; AD is short for Anno Domini (Latin for the year of our Lord).
3. At the start of the 1st century AD, there was great anticipation in Israel that Messiah's coming was near.
 - a. Babylon, Persia, and Greece had come and gone, and a fourth empire was now in control of Palestine. And, Daniel's 490 year prophecy has been counting down. There are less than 50 years between 444 BC (the date of Israel's release from Babylon) and the first decades of 1st century.
 - b. The right time had arrived for the Seed to come into this world. Israel was about to see Almighty God give the full revelation of Himself and His plan of redemption in and through Jesus. Heb 1:1-2
- C. Matt 3:1-2—About AD 26, news spread through Israel that a prophet was on the scene, speaking in the name of the Lord, John the Baptist. John urged people to repent because the kingdom was at hand. Remember, John was speaking to people who, based on Daniel's prophecies, believed God's kingdom was coming.
1. Mark 1:4—John the Baptist...lived in the wilderness and was preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven (NLT).
 - a. This was not Christian baptism (there are no Christians yet). Ceremonial purification was common among the Jews. Many rabbis (teachers of the Law of Moses) baptized or immersed their students in ceremonial baths under the stairs leading to the Temple in Jerusalem. It's preparation.
 - b. John 1:19-20—When religious leaders heard of John's ministry, they sent priests to ask what he was doing. People wondered if he might be the Christ, Elijah, or that prophet. These were reasonable questionings, based on the writings of the Old Testament prophets.
 1. Deut 18:15-18—Just before Moses died, in his final address to the Israelites, he said that God would raise up a prophet like him, whom they must listen to. Moses was mediator for his people, a prophet, priest, and king—all rolls that Jesus would assume. Moses (a real person) was also a type of Jesus. Moses' role in Israel foreshadowed some of what Jesus would be.
 2. And, Malachi, the last prophet sent to Israel before the 400 year silent period began, ended his book with this statement: Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives (Mal 3:5, NLT).
 - c. John 1:21-23—John answered these concerns with the Word of God: I am the one Isaiah spoke of, the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord (Isa 40:3-5).
 1. When eastern monarchs journeyed to a new country, they sent someone ahead to announce their coming and prepare the way (literally if necessary) by reconfiguring the roads.
 2. John was fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. John called men to prepare for the Lord's coming. Jesus later said that John came in the spirit of Elijah. Matt 11:7-15; Matt 17:10-13
 2. Shortly thereafter, Jesus began His public ministry. He also preached repent for the kingdom is at hand. Mark 1:15—The time has come at last—and the kingdom of God has arrived (J. B. Phillips).

- a. Jesus called twelve men who became His disciples (learners or pupils) and His apostles (sent ones). For the next several years, Jesus travelled around Israel with these men, preaching the good news of the kingdom, teaching in synagogues, casting out devils, and healing the sick. Matt 4:23-25
 1. Jesus claimed that Moses wrote about Him: Jesus told the Pharisees: If you had believed Moses, you would have believed me because he wrote about me (John 5:46, NLT).
 2. Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah. In a conversation with a Samaritan woman, she said: I know the Messiah will come—the one who is called Christ. When he comes he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus told her: I am the Messiah (John 4:25-26, NLT).
 3. When John the Baptist’s disciples came to ask if Jesus really was the Messiah, Jesus quoted Isaiah’s prophecy that when the Lord comes, the blind will see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dead will be raised. Isa 35:4-6
 - b. After a three plus year ministry, Jesus fulfilled the ultimate purpose for which He came. He died on a cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin, so that all who believe on Him can be cleansed from the guilt and power of sin, and become holy, righteous sons and daughters of God (lessons for another day).
 - c. Matt 16:21; 20:17-19—Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. By rising from the dead, He authenticated every claim He made. (We have more to say about His resurrection next week.)
 1. Before Jesus returned to Heaven forty days later, He commissioned His apostles to go out and tell the world about His resurrection. Acts 1:8, 21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; etc.
 2. They spent the rest of their lives telling the world what they saw. They were so convinced of what they witnessed (Jesus’ resurrection), they were willing to die for what they saw and heard.
 3. As part of their effort to spread the good news of the resurrection of Jesus and all that it means, these eyewitnesses began to write the documents that are now included in the New Testament.
 - a. Like the Old Testament authors, the New Testament writers did not set out to write a religious book. They wrote to facilitate the spread of the gospel—the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection.
 1. Five of the books (the gospels and Acts) are historical narratives, with content that can be verified through secular records and archaeological evidence (more on this next week).
 2. Twenty-one documents are letters (or epistles). As the apostles spread the gospel and groups of believers formed, it became necessary to write letters to further teach and instruct them.
 3. There is one prophecy book (the Book of Revelation). Before Jesus returned to Heaven, He promised that He will come again to establish His everlasting kingdom on earth. Revelation deals with the Lord’s return and the culmination of the plan of Redemption.
 - b. All twenty-seven New Testament documents were written by eyewitnesses of Jesus, or close associates of eyewitnesses. With the exception of two authors, the writers had close, personal interaction with Jesus for years. The other two had close interaction with multiple eyewitnesses.
- C. Conclusion: Next week we’ll examine the secular evidence for Jesus’ existence, and we’ll consider the evidence for His resurrection. But note these points as we close.
1. The Bible was written by real people to other real people to communicate important information about God’s ultimate plan for His people. Nobody in 1st century Israel heard Daniel’s timelines as prophecies about “**the end times!**”—although, in part, they are. The first hearers heard it as a promise from God.
 2. They were looking for a promised Redeemer who would undo the damage done by sin and restore their nation. That’s what Jesus came to do—only the plan is bigger than they imagined. The redemption Jesus brings is for more than Israel. It’s for all who throughout history have put faith in Him. John 3:16
 3. There’s a plan unfolding. The Bible record helps us look back and see that this plan isn’t random. It’s a purposeful, loving plan with a good end. Knowing that we’re part of something that is bigger than ourselves and this life, gives us perspective and hope in the midst of this sin damaged world. More next week!