

Front Page - 2014 12

The Perfection of God's Providential Timings

Introduction

Luke, who wrote the third gospel, was a physician (Col. 4:14); a researcher and confirmer of material concerning the history of the Christ while on earth (Lk. 1:1-24:51); and a companion of Paul as is seen by the word "we" (Acts 16:10). It appears that he was a Gentile (Col. 4:10-14) where the first three persons are said to be of the circumcision. His book is marked by preciseness of times and events such as:

- a) "In the days of Herod" (Lk. 1:5)
- b) "In those days" (Lk. 2:1)
- c) "The sixth month" (Lk. 1:26, 36)
- d) "Full time" (Lk. 1:57)
- e) "Eighth day" (Lk. 1:59; 2:21)
- f) "The days were accomplished that she should be delivered" (Lk. 2:6).

This was not just a happened-to-be situation for the Holy Spirit informs us: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Thus, in the purposes of God the birth of the Lord was at a precise time in earth's history.

It helps if this passage is viewed in its chronological order, for it is easy to miss the fact that between verses 21 and 22 there are thirty-three days according to the law. The Biblical order was:

- a) The birth of the baby.
- b) On the eighth day the child was circumcised (Lk. 2:21) according to the command of God (Gen. 17:12), and the law (Lev. 12:3).
- c) After another thirty-three days she was to come to the temple and present an offering for her purification (Lk. 2:22), according to the law (Lev. 12:6-8).

Around the time when the Lord was born there were several groups of people and individuals who come into focus. Chronologically, possibly before the Lord was born, the wise men were made aware that the King had been born, for Matthew informs us: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem . . . there came wise men from the East" (Matt. 2:1). When He was born the shepherds, who were in the field, heard the announcement by the angel and celestial hosts (Lk. 2:8-14). Eight days after the birth the baby was brought to the temple for his circumcision and thereupon we have the narrative of Simeon (Lk. 2:25-35). When Simeon was finished, at that instance Anna came into the temple (Lk. 2:38). The preciseness of God's providential timings is seen in the order in which they came to the Baby, Mary, Joseph, and in what they said! It is so easy to miss.

It is interesting that Mary referred to Joseph only once as the "father", but clearly not biologically (Lk. 2:48; 3:23), yet he is viewed as a "parent" for this he was governmentally (Lk. 2:27, 41).

Simeon

What an introduction to this man. "There was a man in Jerusalem", and to him the Lord gave multiple revelations. He would see the Lord's Christ, and He would not die until that had occurred (Lk. 2:25-26). Normally we make the assumption that he was an old man, but there is nothing in the scriptures to base that on. Peter was also told what way he would die while he was young (Jn. 21:18-19). Unlike Anna who "departed not from the temple" (Lk. 2:37), Simeon came "by the Spirit into the temple" (Lk. 2:27). This man was "just", that is righteous in his lifestyle; and "devout", that is careful and circumspect in the keeping of the law. The longings of his heart was seen in his attitude of "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk. 2:25), and "the Holy Ghost was upon him" (Lk. 2:25). Taking the child in his arms he begins his wondrous praise and prophetic declarations.

- a) Speaking first to God he said: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Lk. 2:29-32).

Front Page - 2014 12

The Perfection of God's Providential Timings

- b) Then speaking to Mary He said: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:34-35).

The Actions of Simeon

I find the words: "Then he took Him up in his arms" (Lk. 2:28). It is a stupendous truth that man embraced the salvation of God! With what tenderness an adult takes a baby in their arms, but this was more than tenderness, it was in some ways the spiritual zenith of Simeon's life, for cradled in his arms was the One whose name is "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, he Prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6).

The Words of Simeon To God

Speaking of the Lord he does not say, "Mine eyes have seen the Messiah" or "the Desire of nations" (Hag. 2:7), but says: "Thy salvation"! (Lk. 2:30) and what a salvation Simeon spoke about. Salvation and redemption are exclusively in this One who had come to visit, and He was none other than "LORD our Lord" (Jehovah our Adon) (Psa. 8:1, 4). God had not only prepared the salvation (Lk. 2:30-31) but also the body for the Redeemer (Heb. 10:5) who would bring salvation and redemption (Lk. 1:68). It was not a localized selective redemption as Israel's was when coming out of Egypt, but it was universal, being for: "All people; A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Lk. 2:31-32).

Despite all that had been revealed to Mary and Joseph, such were these words to them that they marveled, and yet there was to be the dark side, and that was revealed in his words to Mary.

The Words of Simeon To Mary

The words now uttered were words that would cause concern to any parent, especially the last ones spoken: "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul" (Lk. 2:35).

The message is in four parts: "This child is set, destined, appointed"

- a) "For the fall and rising of many in Israel" (Lk. 2:34)
- i) As the "Stone" He will crush all those who stand against Him, and they will fall whether it is individuals or nations (Dan. 2:34-35, 44; Isa. 8:14; Matt. 21:44; 1 Pet. 2:8). For those who take Him for their salvation, they will have a foundation "Stone" (Isa. 28:16) and will spiritually rise, being saved.
 - ii) Individuals will be forced to make a decision, the acceptance of God's salvation through Christ, or rejection. There is no neutrality.
- b) "For a sign which shall be spoken against" (Lk. 2:34)
- i) He is the "sign" from God that God is true to His word.
 1. He will bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15)
 2. He will set His king on His holy hill of Zion (Psa. 2:6)
 3. He shall provide salvation (Acts 13:38)
 4. Many will deny who He is, rejecting His kingship (Lk. 19:14); Messiahship (Jn. 10:24-26); and Prophethood (Deut. 18:15).
 5. The nation of Israel will commit the most grievous sin in rejecting and crucifying their own Messiah (Dan. 9:26), crying: "Away with Him, crucify Him" (Jn. 19:15).
 6. His authenticating works will be denied, the power by which He does the works will be attributed to Satan (Matt. 12:27), and when risen from the dead, that also will be spoken again and denied (Matt. 28:11-15).

Front Page - 2014 12

The Perfection of God's Providential Timings

- c) "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul" (Lk. 2:35)
 - i) For a mother, who has a unique love for her child, it is exceedingly difficult to hear her son mocked and belittled, but even worse was to see Him so hated then beaten and lashed and led out to be crucified. Like any mother she waited, and even when John would have taken her to his own home, one can see her stopping to look back. Only a mother who would have this happen to her son could know how Mary somehow felt. Truly a sword pierced her own soul.
- d) "The thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed"
 - i) Man's response to Christ as God's Salvation will reveal what is the attitude of their hearts irrespective of what they profess. Those who take the Lord's name in vain, or use abbreviations as in texting when there is written OMG which is the abbreviated form of "O My God / Goodness". Irrespective if such a one sings in the choir, goes to church, takes communion, their speech shows what they are in their hearts. This is confirmed by the Lord when He said: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19)

If I then step back and put myself in the shoes of Mary, how would I feel with such an announcement? I would be devastated, perhaps stunned that my child was going to have such an influence from poor parents, but what of the anguish I was to experience. It would be so easy to get depressed. This is when we see the riches of God's providential timings, for it is at this point Anna comes in.

Anna

Anna was a very devoted woman who, despite her very old age, being eighty-four years of age and having known the death of her husband, she lived in full devotion to God (Lk. 2:37).

She also speaks to God and man but we never read of her speaking to the mother. She "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord" and, "spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Lk. 2:38). We are not told the particulars of what Anna thanked God for, but we can be sure it was because of His "mercy which endureth forever" (1 Chron. 16:34); the redemption He had provided (Lk. 1:68) and had "raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (Lk. 1:69). It was of Him and the redemption He secured she spoke.

After the storm clouds Simeon had spoken of had fallen on Mary's ears, now comes the communication of Anna. Mary's baby was the One who would secure a redemption which would make that of the redemption from Egypt fade by comparison. What an honour it was for Jochebed to be the mother of Moses (Ex. 6:20), the great deliverer of God's people from Egypt, or the unnamed mother of Zerubbabel who led the people back from Babylon. The honour placed on Mary, the mother of the one who would save His people from their sins, the One whom God calls "His Redeemer" (Isa. 44:6). This was a real encouragement which would help in the days ahead.

Concluding Thoughts

In one of Dickens' novels the last lines speak of "providence", and I thank God for his providential timings and workings. He is the sovereign God and irrespective of what any man, president, dictator, king, czar, or emperor may boast about doing, He has never and will never relinquish His throne, and will eternally rule in superlative righteousness. When life seems to suddenly go contrary to the norm (as Mary and Joseph's did), may we be encouraged by the Christmas story that God is providentially directing our lives.

... Rowan Jennings