



Silverdale Baptist

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE ~ FULFILLED PROPHECY

Gal. 4:4-5; Ecc. 3:1-2, 11; Gen. 3:15; Dan. 9:25-26; 2 Cor. 6:2
12/10-11/22

Big Idea

God rules over time and sent Jesus to earth at precisely the perfect time.

Getting Started

When do you start preparing for Christmas?

When do you take your decorations down?

We probably all have different Christmas traditions. Our traditions most likely include the date we start decorating our homes or begin listening to Christmas music. But, as Pastor Tony pointed out, God's Christmas preparations started before time, before the creation of the world. Christmas was already in the heart of God when He created Adam and Eve.

Pastor Tony talks about God's perfect timing in this second Christmas message.

Learn

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 4: 4-5.

What do we learn about God's timing from these verses?

And, why specifically was Jesus born?

Galatians 4:4-5 explain the heart of Christmas. Pastor Tony helped us see God's timing in this passage and a few others.

1. God rules over time.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-2, and 11.

In what ways do we see God in control over time in these verses?

2. Christ came at the perfect time.

Since God is over time, He can and does orchestrate events to accomplish His perfect plan.

What did Paul tell us in Galatians 4:4-5 about God's perfect timing?

Pastor Tony pointed out two reasons Christ's birth was at the perfect time:

- A shared language
- A shared government

How do these two things show God's perfect timing?

The Greek language was the international language of the day. Not only is Greek an exact and expressive language, but since it was spoken across the Roman Empire, missionaries could share the gospel everywhere they went. The Romans also brought relative peace, Pax Roma, to the areas they controlled. This meant missionaries could quickly spread the gospel across the empire.

3. Christ's coming perfectly fulfilled God's prophecies.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 3:15.

***Leader:** this verse takes place immediately after Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3. God is speaking, and He is addressing Satan. Eve's "offspring" is Jesus, the Messiah.*

What is God's judgment on Satan in this verse?

What is God promising Eve?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 7:14.

What is the “sign” the Lord will give us?

In Genesis 3, God promised Eve that her seed (not Adam's seed) would crush the head of Satan. So God was hinting at the virgin birth even all the way back in Genesis 3.

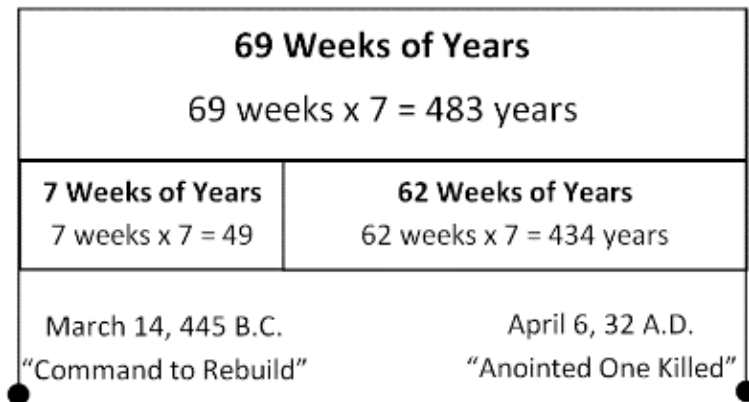
| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 9:25-26.

Some people find Daniel 9: 24-27 complicated, and it is a challenging passage. But, as Pastor Tony pointed out, it is understandable if you read it carefully. Most scholars understand each of Daniel's *weeks* to be a period of seven years.

How many weeks of years does the angel Gabriel describe in verse 25?

What happens by the end of those years?

After the period of years (7 weeks + 62 weeks of years = 69 weeks or 483 years), what happens to the Messiah?



Gabriel gave Daniel the date for the crucifixion of the Messiah. Only God could have orchestrated that!

4. God has appointed a time for you.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 6:2.

What do we learn about time from this passage?

When should we repent and surrender our lives to Christ?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 4: 4-5.

Apply

How have you seen God's perfect timing in your own life?

Some of us have seen God's perfect timing in others' lives, but we are struggling in our own lives. So keep focusing on Him, and trust in His perfect timing for your life.

How does God's perfect timing in the birth of Jesus give you hope in your struggles?

How has God spoken to you in this study?

Who do you know that needs to hear the real Christmas story?

Will you tell them?

Pray

Father, You sent Jesus at precisely the right time in history. Would You help us trust your perfect timing in our lives? And, Father, give us the faith and courage to invite others to embrace Jesus this Christmas season.

Dig Deeper

Galatians 4:4-5

4:4 Verses 4–5 contain one of the most compressed and highly charged passages in the entire letter because they present the objective basis, the Christological and soteriological foundation, for the doctrine of justification by faith. Many scholars believe that here, just as with the baptismal formula in 3:26–28, Paul reproduced, perhaps with some modifications, an early confession of faith drawn from the worship and proclamation of the first Christian churches. The early incorporation of these verses into the traditional liturgy of Christmas also points to their appeal as a basic kerygmatic text.

When we analyze these verses in terms of their structure, we find four central ideas brought together within a single literary unit. To begin with, there is a temporal introduction, “but when the time had fully come,” an expression that connects this passage to the illustration of the minor heir entering into his full inheritance at the father’s preappointed time. Next there is the announcement of God’s supernatural intervention in the mission of Jesus Christ, “God sent his Son.” This sending formula is followed immediately by two parallel participial constructions describing the condition and status of the incarnate Son: He was “born of woman” and “born under the law.” Finally, in v. 5, two purpose/result clauses, both introduced by *hina* (“in order that”), describe the reason for the coming of Christ and the great benefit believers receive through faith in him (literally): “in order that he might redeem those who are under law” and “in order that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Thus in a remarkable way Paul

brought into focus here both the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christology and soteriology can never be separated; where one is inadequate, the other will always be deficient. In this passage Paul united these twin peaks of evangelical doctrine under the controlling rubric of God's gracious initiative and divine purpose.

The expression "when the time had fully come," (Literally, "when the fullness of time had come"; JB "the appointed time"), is found only here in Paul's writings. In the analogy of the heir-in-waiting just developed by Paul, the time designated by the father for his son to enter into the inheritance corresponds to the time in human history fixed and appointed by God for the sending forth of his Son. So significant was the advent of Christ for the Christian understanding of time that believers of a later generation divided all the time there is by this seminal event into A.D. and B.C. Elsewhere Paul described Christians as those "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11).

What did Paul mean by the "fullness" of time? Early Christian apologists pointed to the fact that the birth of the Messiah occurred during the *Pax Romana*, a period of relative peace and stability. Others have pointed to the development of a common language, favorable means of travel, the emergence of an urban civilization that made possible the rapid spread of the Christian message, and so forth. Still others have pointed to the lapse of a definite period of time (cf. Dan 9:24) that had to occur before the appearance of the Messiah. It is sufficient to say with Calvin that "the time which had been ordained by the providence of God was seasonable and fit... Therefore the right time for the Son of God to be revealed to the world was for God alone to judge and determine."

One could hardly find a more succinct summary of the Christian gospel than the expression "God sent his Son." Implicit in these words are two ideas, both of which are fundamental to a holistic Christological affirmation: divine intentionality and eternal deity. The coming of Jesus Christ into human history was not an accidental happening in late antiquity. Not only was the incarnation the fulfillment of myriads of Old Testament prophecies, but it also was the culmination of a plan devised within the eternal counsel of the triune God before the creation of the world. Thus the Epistle to the Hebrews places on the lips of Christ the words of Ps 40: "Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God' " (Heb 10:7). There can be no "christology from below" until first of all we acknowledge a prior "christology from above."

Having asserted so boldly the eternal deity of Jesus Christ, Paul now affirmed his true humanity and representative role as one "born of woman" and "born under the law." The phrase "born of woman" is used elsewhere in Scripture as a common Jewish expression denoting simply one's status as a human being—as, for example, Job 14:1, "For man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (cf. Matt 11:11). Paul was here affirming that during his earthly life Jesus experienced all of the finitude and fears, trials and temptations that are the common lot of every human being. As Heb 4:15 expresses it, Jesus was put to the test in every conceivable way that we can be put to the test—yet without sin.

Is Gal 4:4 an implicit reference to the virginal conception of Christ? This verse, along with Rom 1:3, has been taken to imply that Paul knew and taught what the Gospels of Matthew and Luke plainly declare, namely, that Jesus was conceived without the cooperation of a human father, "born of a woman" who was a virgin. On the other hand, many others point to the lack of an explicit mention of the virgin birth in Paul's writings in order to downplay or deny this supernaturalist teaching. For example, a liberal Baptist leader in Germany recently boasted that he believed about the virgin birth just what the apostle Paul did—nothing!

It is inconceivable that Paul, the travel companion of Luke, would not have known about the virginal conception of Jesus. The fact that he nowhere mentions the virgin birth in his letters could only mean that it was so universally accepted among the Christian churches to which he wrote that he deemed no

elaboration or defense of it necessary. As J. G. Machen noted, “The virgin birth does seem to be implied in the profoundest way in the entire view which Paul holds of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In a parallel participial clause, Paul also asserted that Jesus was “born under the law.” Not only was he a man, but he also was a Jewish man, circumcised on the eighth day as all Jewish males were. He grew up in a Jewish home reading the Torah, praying to his Heavenly Father, attending synagogue, faithfully fulfilling, as no one before or after him has ever done, all of the precepts and demands of the law. To some extent Jesus’ life “under the law” was comparable to the heir of Gal 4:1–2. Of Jesus it was quintessentially true that he was “no different from a slave although he was the Lord of all.” However, unlike the heir who was subject to custodians and trustees, that is, the elemental spirits of the universe, Jesus always acted in perfect freedom and filial obedience only to the Father. Jesus was not enslaved to the bondage of the elements but was victorious over them throughout his ministry—casting out demons, stilling the winds, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead. As F. F. Bruce has noted, while Jesus was “under the law,” he was nevertheless not under sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Thus “he himself had no need of slave-attendant, guardian or steward, and he came to bring his people to the point where they too could dispense with their services.”

4:5 In this verse Paul turned from Christology to soteriology, from the divine person and eternal deity of Jesus Christ to his saving work in redemption and regeneration. The Son of God became a human being and was put under the law in order (1) to redeem those who were under the law and (2) so that we might become God’s sons. Some have thought the first aspect of Christ’s work mentioned here, redemption, pertained only to the Jews while the other benefit, adoption, was meant exclusively for the Gentiles. However, as we have seen, Jews and Gentiles alike are under the bondage of the law including its curse; conversely, Jews who are outside of Christ, no less than Gentiles with their pagan past, can only be brought into God’s family through personal faith in the Messiah. The whole purport of Gal 3 and 4 is to show that we are justified by faith, not through the flesh.

The word “redeem” recalls Paul’s earlier statement (3:10–13) concerning the curse of the law Christ bore in his own body on the cross. The purpose and goal of Christ’s incarnation and humiliation, his being made “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” as Paul put it in Rom 8:3, was precisely so that God could condemn sin in the flesh and so receive as righteous all those who find in Jesus Christ the sole and sufficient substitute for the sin debt they owed but could not pay. As J. Denney expressed it: “Christ not only became *man*, bound to obedience ..., but he became *curse* for us. He made our doom his own. He took on him not only the calling of a man, but our responsibility as sinful men; it is in this that his work as our Redeemer lies, for it is in this that the measure, or rather the immensity, of his love is seen.”

If redemption implies a basically negative background—we are redeemed *from* the curse of the law, *from* the slave market of sin, *from* the clutches of the hostile elemental spirits—Paul went on to show the positive purpose for Christ’s sacrificial suffering and death. The Son of God was born of woman and put under the law in order to redeem us from the law so that we might receive “the full rights of sons.” The Greek word translated “full rights of sons” in the NIV is *huiothesia*, literally “adoption.”

Within the body of Scripture, this word is uniquely Pauline and carries several distinct meanings. In Eph 1:5 adoption is rooted in God’s sovereign election, for God has “predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” In Rom 8:23 adoption encompasses our future resurrection, “the redemption of our bodies” for which we eagerly wait. Elsewhere in Romans (9:4–5) adoption heads the list of the blessings given to the people of Israel because of their special relationship with God. Here in Gal 4:5 (cf. also Rom 8:15) adoption refers to the present status of sonship accorded to all believers who through the new birth have become heirs with Christ of the Abrahamic promise.

Adoption was a commonly known legal procedure in the Hellenistic world, the most famous example being Julius Caesar's adoption of his great-nephew Octavius, who later succeeded him as the emperor Caesar Augustus. The Roman process of adoption would certainly have been known to Paul's Gentile converts in Galatia. They could well have identified with the idea of chosen and instated as new members of God's family given their own former life as idolaters and devotees of false gods.

More recently, however, J. M. Scott, among others, has argued for a specifically Old Testament/Jewish background for adoption in Pauline theology. The key text is 2 Sam 7:14, "I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son," which is taken to be an adoption formula echoed elsewhere in the Old Testament (cf. Exod 2:10; Esth 2:7; Gen 48:5; Hos 11:1). According to this view, Gal 4:1–2 does not reflect the situation of a Roman heir held in legal infancy until the time of majority specified by his father but rather the situation of the nation of Israel awaiting deliverance from bondage prior to the exodus. "Just as Israel, as heir to the Abrahamic promise, was redeemed as sons of God from slavery in Egypt at the time appointed by the father, so also believers were redeemed to adoption as sons of God from slavery under the 'elements of the world' at the fullness of time and thereby became heirs to the Abrahamic promise.... In other words, believers who are thus baptized into the messianic Son of God and take up his very cry of 'Abba!' to the Father participate with him in the Davidic promise of divine adoption and in the Abrahamic promise of universal sovereignty."

Whether the background of Paul's adoption language is Roman or Jewish, it speaks in a powerful way of the tremendous transformation in our relationship to God. Through God's gracious initiative we have been delivered out of slavery unto sonship, out of bondage to sin and the powers of destruction produced by it into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This radical change is further explained now in terms of the indwelling Spirit within.¹

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, 11.

Life is composed of joy and sorrow, building and destroying, and living and dying. Each comes at the proper time. This reminds us that we are creatures of time and not yet able to partake of the joys of eternity. No one can be happy who has not come to grips with the reality that life is full of changes and sorrows as well as continuity and joy. We must accept that we are mortal and governed by time.

3:1 The poem concerns life "under heaven." It is not so much a theological statement as an observation on human life in the human world.

3:2 Instead of a time to "be born" the Hebrew term should be rendered "give birth." Giving birth and planting are both ways of giving life.²

3:11 "Beautiful" here means "appropriate." If we can accept life as it is, even the hard parts will be bearable. Yet there is a catch. We feel like aliens in the world of time and yearn to be part of eternity.⁷² We feel the need for ourselves and our work to be eternal and yet are grieved to be trapped in time. We also desire to understand our place in the universe against the backdrop of eternity. But we cannot find out what God has done from beginning to end. That is, we are not able to discern any plan or pattern to all of this. God's purposes are outside our realm of control or investigation. We thus have a sense of alienation and bewilderment in time.³

¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 299–306.

² Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 298.

³ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 299–300.

Genesis 3:15

3:15 The curse upon the serpent includes its final destruction by the descendant of the woman. This animosity is at the instigation of God. The serpent was instrumental in the undoing of the woman, and in turn the woman will ultimately bring down the serpent through her offspring. At one level the hostility between serpent and woman reflects the universal enmity people have for such reptiles and therefore serves as a prototype. However, this is no etiology designed to explain why man abhors snakes since the verse indicates there is a future history for the serpent and the woman. That future history of antagonism is not delineated here, yet the conclusion of the matter is made explicit: the serpent has a limited life expectancy that will come to a violent end.

“Enmity” has the intensity of hostility experienced among nations in warfare (e.g., Ezek 25:15; 35:5) and the level of animosity that results in murder (e.g., Num 35:21). The language of the passage indicates a life-and-death struggle between combatants. “Crush” and “strike” translate the same Hebrew verb *šûp* (AV, “bruise”)²⁰³ and describe the combatants’ parallel action, but the location of the blow distinguishes the severity and success of the attack. The impact delivered by the offspring of the woman “at the head” is mortal, while the serpent will deliver a blow only “at the heel.” Continuing the imagery of the snake, the strike at the human heel is appropriate for a serpent since it slithers along the ground, while the human foot stomps the head of the vile creature.

“Between you [serpent]” has the singular pronoun (as elsewhere in the verse), meaning that this hostility begins with the beast and the woman as individuals. Yet their experience is shared by their offspring too; the serpent and woman are distinct from their offspring yet also one and the same with them. Here we have the common case where an individual represents many. Eve and her adversary are the progenitors of a lifelong struggle that will persist until a climactic moment when the woman’s offspring will achieve the upper hand.

This continuum of experience between parent and offspring is seen by the parallelism of the verse (v. 15b//15c): “between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.” Moreover, “offspring” is the rendering of the Hebrew term for “seed” (*zeraʿ*), which may refer to an individual or to a group. It is ambiguous by itself since it may be singular, referring to a specific child (e.g., 4:25), or a singular collective indicating a plural progeny (e.g., 12:7; Isa 41:8). Modern versions show this by their diverse renderings, proposing singular or plural translations for the following pronouns. “Seed” is a resourceful term for speaking of all human history while at the same time permitting a reference to a specific individual descendant. This explains why the individual offspring of the woman (“he,” “his heel”) can be said to do battle with the progenitor serpent (“your head,” “you”) in v. 15d and 15e.

“Seed” (*zeraʿ*) is a critical term in the whole of Genesis and the Pentateuch. It first occurs in a literal sense in the creation account (1:11–12, 29), but here it is metaphorical and takes on programmatic significance. Of its fifty-nine occurrences in Genesis, the majority are found in the patriarchal narratives (47x), where the focal concern lies with the genealogical lineage of the chosen family. The patriarchal accounts explain what is only introduced in 3:15. The creation blessing (1:28), which was jeopardized by the couple’s disobedience, is particularized through the Hebrew fathers, who will be instrumental in its realization. Chapter 3’s oracle implies a hope for the human family that despite their sin there will be a fulfillment of the blessing through progeny as foreseen at creation (1:26–28). This hope for the appointed “seed” is unveiled progressively by the offspring of Eve through Seth (“another seed,” 4:26; his genealogy, 5:1–32), through Noah’s offspring (9:9), and the seed of Abraham first described in 12:7 (with 12:1–3). Moreover, this promise points to the Mosaic community, which defined itself as the offspring promised to Abraham (e.g., Exod 32:11–14; Deut 11:8–12).

Christian tradition has referred to 3:15 as the *protevangelium* since it has been taken as the prototype for the Christian gospel. Historically interpreters have differed about whether “her seed” refers to an individual or is a collective singular indicating all humanity. The LXX version may be the earliest attested interpretation of “seed” as an individual. It translates the Hebrew *zera’* (“seed”) with the Greek *sperma*, a neuter noun. The expected antecedent pronoun is “it [*auto*] will crush your head,” but the Greek has “he” (*autos*), which suggests that the translators interpreted “seed” as an individual. The Targums, Jewish pseudepigrapha, and later rabbinic commentators, however, generally viewed the “seed” as collective for humankind. Christian interpreters showed a mixed opinion.²¹⁰ Justin and Irenaeus interpreted the woman of 3:15 as the virgin Mary by drawing a parallel with Eve. Greek Fathers, such as Chrysostom, viewed 3:15 as a depiction of the struggle between Satan and humanity. Still others interpreted “seed” as the church. Among the Latin Fathers, Augustine with others allegorized or moralized the verse, indicating a collective use. Others saw in it a specific reference to the virgin birth. This was aided by some Old Latin texts and the Vulgate, which had the feminine pronoun “she [*ipsa*] shall crush” rather than the masculine. It was Ambrose who first quoted 3:15 as not “her seed” but “the woman’s seed.” Among the Reformers, Luther took “her seed” as reference to both humanity in general and Christ in particular; Calvin demurred such a view and applied it as a collective, not to all humanity but rather to the church under the headship of Christ, which would prove victorious (quoting Rom 16:20).

Our passage provides for this mature reflection that points to Christ as the vindicator of the woman (cp. Rom 16:20). There may be an allusion to our passage in Gal 4:4, which speaks of God’s Son as “born of a woman.” Specifically, Paul identified Christ as the “seed” ultimately intended in the promissory blessing to Abraham (Gal 3:16), and Abraham’s believing offspring includes the church (Rom 4:13, 16–18; Gal 3:8). This is further developed in John’s Gospel, where the spiritual dimension is at the forefront. Jesus alluded to our verse when he indicted the Pharisees as children of the “devil” because of their spiritual apostasy (John 8:44), contrary to their claims to be the offspring of righteous Abraham (8:39). John used similar imagery when he contrasted God’s “seed” and those who are “of the devil” (1 John 3:7–10). This is heightened by his appeal to Cain’s murder of righteous Abel as paradigmatic of one “who belonged to the evil one” (3:11–15). Finally, the Apocalypse describes the “red dragon,” who is identified as “that ancient serpent” (Rev 12:9), opposing the believing community (i.e., the woman) and plotting the destruction of her child (i.e., the Messiah). Ultimately, “that ancient serpent” is destroyed by God for its deception of the nations (Rev 20:2, 7–10).⁴

Daniel 9:25-26

Now for the outline of the 490 years. Verse 25 tells us that the event that will trigger the 490 years is a decree (see Neh. 2:5) permitting the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. (It is interesting that the event that will trigger the last seven years of this period will be the covenant of the Antichrist to protect the Jews. We find a decree at the beginning and at the end of the 490 years.) History tells us there were four different decrees relating to Jerusalem: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes all made decrees concerning the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1, 6, and 7); and Artaxerxes decreed that Nehemiah could return to rebuild the walls (Neh. 2). This was in 445 B.C., and it is the decree Dan. 9:25 is talking about; it took place nearly 100 years after Daniel received the message from God. Gabriel said that there would be a total of sixty-nine weeks, seven and sixty-two, between the giving of the decree and the arrival of Messiah, the Prince, in Jerusalem ($\times = 483$ years). Keep in mind that “prophetic years” in the Bible are not 365 days, but 360 days long. It has been calculated by scholars that there were 483

⁴ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 245–248.

prophetic years between the decree in 445 B.C. and the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (cf. *The Coming Prince* by Sir Robert Anderson, Kregel, 1967).

But Gabriel divided these 483 years into two parts—seven weeks ($\times = 49$ years), and sixty-two weeks ($\times = 434$ years). Why? Well, it took forty-nine years to rebuild Jerusalem, and this was done (as Gabriel said) “in troublesome times.” Read Nehemiah and see how difficult a task it was to restore the city. Then, 434 years later we come to Messiah, the Prince, who is “cut off” (His death on the cross) for the sins of the world. It was His death on the cross that accomplished the purposes given in v. 24. What followed His death? Did Israel accept Him and His message? No. They lied about Him, persecuted His messengers, stoned Stephen, and refused to acknowledge His kingship. What happened? Rome came and destroyed the city and wrecked the temple. The nation “cut off” Jesus Christ, so He cut them off from being a nation. Until May 14, 1948, Israel was not a free nation.

Rome is called “the people of the prince that shall come.” Who is this prince? Not “Messiah the Prince,” because that refers to Christ. “The prince that shall come” is Antichrist. He will be the leader of the restored Roman Empire. So, the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was but an illustration of a future invasion and destruction to be led by Antichrist. This prince will make an agreement with the Jews to protect them from the other nations, and this agreement will be set for seven years. This final seven years is the completion of Daniel’s 490-year period. Between the death of Christ and the signing of this covenant you have the entire Age of the Church, a “great parenthesis” in God’s program. The 490 years are in operation only when Israel is in God’s will as God’s people. When Israel crucified Christ, she was set aside and the “prophetic clock” stopped ticking. But when the Antichrist signs his pact with Israel, then the last seven years of Daniel’s “seventy weeks” will start being fulfilled. This seven-year period is known as the Tribulation, or the time of Jacob’s trouble. It is described in Rev. 6–19.⁵

2 Corinthians 6:2

6:2 Paul explains the gravity of the situation with a verbatim quotation from Isa 49:8 (quoting the LXX, not the Hebrew text). The acceptable time (“the time of my favor”) is when God mercifully answered prayer and acted for Israel’s salvation. Paul then provides a commentary on what this passage means now. It refers to something even greater than the return from exile in Babylon. The “now” refers to the eschatological change of the ages inaugurated by Christ’s death (see Rom 3:21, 26; 5:9, 11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1). The day of salvation applies to the deliverance from sin’s captivity through Jesus’ cross and resurrection. The acceptable time (“the time of God’s favor,” NIV) refers to God’s timetable that completely ignores what is acceptable or timely to humans. The implication would be clear to those in Paul’s age who were familiar with the ancient cliché “to seize the day.” To become acceptable to God, one must accept God’s offer of reconciliation. Yet hearing the promise is no guarantee that the promise will be received. They must obey as long as it is still called “Today” (Heb 3:13).

Plummer suggests that Paul may have turned to this passage in Isaiah because Isaiah’s case resembled his own. In the Isaian context (Isa 49:1–6), the prophet presents his credentials. The Lord formed him from his mother’s womb to be his servant, to reconcile Israel to be a light to the nations, so that God’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth (see Gal 1:15). But when the prophet delivered his message, he met with a less than enthusiastic response from the people. He expresses his bitter disappointment, “I have labored in vain” (49:4), while also expressing his confidence that his cause is with the Lord: “For I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength” (Isa 49:5). Plummer writes, “Although men despise him, God will honour him by confirming his message; and the

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Da 9:20–27.

God who has had compassion on Israel in spite of their sins, will have compassion on all the nations.... Word for word this is true of the Apostle.” Danker thinks that Paul understands himself to be like the servant in Isaiah who invites “Israel to share in the benefits of the new age and at the same time proclaims the grace of God to the Gentiles.”⁸⁵⁰ As God raised up Isaiah to speak through him and call the people out of Babylon, so God has raised up Paul as a mouthpiece to comfort and admonish the Corinthians.⁶

⁶ David E. Garland, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 303–305.