

Now Is The Time
By Cornelius R. Stam

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When our LORD preached in the synagogue at Nazareth He declared that it was then “*the acceptable year of the Lord.*”

Has that “*acceptable year*” been extended until today or do we live in another period of God’s dealings with man?

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LUKE 4:16-21

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

“And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me...to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

“TO PREACH THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.

“And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him.

“AND HE BEGAN TO SAY UNTO THEM, THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE FULFILLED IN YOUR EARS.”

Those who have taken the trouble to refer to the passage which the Lord read in Nazareth’s synagogue have made an interesting discovery,—that He only *began* to read the long sentence with which Isaiah 61 opens.

There is much more to the sentence than “the acceptable year of the Lord.” There is “the day of vengeance of our God,” the comforting of the mourners and the millennial joy to follow.

Strange that our Lord should stop reading and close the book right in the middle of the sentence! Strange—that is—until He begins to preach and gives us the clew.

“This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

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Closing the book where He did, our Lord could say this, but He could not have said it had He continued reading, for “the day of vengeance of our God” had not yet and has not even yet come,—much less the kingdom blessings to follow. How perfect is the harmony of God’s Word!

But here we must be careful.

ISRAEL’S DAY

It is sometimes supposed that since the day of God’s vengeance has not yet come, the day in which we live must still be “the acceptable year” to which our Lord referred.

This is the ground generally taken by those who claim to be working under the “great commission,”—those who suppose that Paul merely perpetuated the ministry to the twelve.

According to this reasoning it can still, after nineteen hundred years, be said, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

But in reasoning thus the opponents of Paul’s distinctive ministry miss the very lesson which, above all others, this passage should teach us. That lesson is that it does not pay to despise God’s goodness.

The time referred to by our Lord was *Israel’s* “acceptable year.” It was *her* time of opportunity for the long-promised kingdom was now to be proclaimed “at hand” and would soon be offered.

That this was *in fact* the time of *Israel’s* favor is witnessed by a host of Scriptures.

When a Gentile woman came seeking help, our Lord at first “*answered her not a word*” and said to His disciples, “*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” (Matt. 15:24).

When the twelve apostles were first sent forth to preach, they were explicitly commanded, “*Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” (Matt. 10:5-6).

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And what is this we see and hear outside Jerusalem just before the crucifixion?

“AND WHEN HE WAS COME NEAR, HE BEHELD THE CITY, AND WEPT OVER IT.

“Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this THY DAY, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

“For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,

“And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not THE TIME OF THY VISITATION.”
(Luke 19:41-44).

Yes, this was Israel’s day, and there was a very particular reason why Israel should receive such special favor. It was because God had promised Abraham that in his multiplied seed all nations should be blessed.

See how Peter emphasizes this when, after the resurrection, he offers the kingdom to Israel:

“Ye ARE THE CHILDREN of the prophets, and OF THE COVENANT which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

“UNTO YOU FIRST God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” (Acts 3:25, 26).

AN OPPORTUNITY REJECTED

So great was our Lord’s compassion and love for His people that even in His dying agony He cried, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”*

But as Israel had rejected the message of the King’s forerunner and of the King Himself, so now they reject the *Holy Spirit’s* gracious offer of the kingdom.

The apostles are imprisoned, scourged and threatened. Stephen is stoned by the very Sanhedrin and a “great persecution” arises against the saints at Jerusalem, with Saul of Tarsus making “havock” of the church.

This is what Sir Robert Anderson calls “the secret crisis.” With this “the acceptable year of the Lord” begins to draw to its close, for Israel persists in her rebellion even though Saul, her former leader in it, turns and pleads with her to accept Messiah.

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God did not immediately cease dealing with the nation, but surely her opportunity to accept the kingdom had *practically* passed when converted Saul, upon his return to Jerusalem, was told, “*Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME...I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES.*” (Acts 22:18-21).

Henceforth when Paul went to the Jew first it was only that they might be without excuse, for he never *offered* the kingdom to them,—indeed, this could not be done outside Jerusalem, nor could *he* do it, for the twelve were the officials of the kingdom. (See Matt. 19:28, John 20:21-23, Matt. 16:19, 18:18).

In the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia we find Paul warning the Jews: “*Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; BEHOLD, YE DESPISERS, AND WONDER, AND PERISH...*” But apparently few heeded the warning for the story closes with the Jews “*contradicting and blaspheming*” and Paul declaring, “IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU: BUT SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES.” (Acts 13:40, 41, 46).

At Corinth again Paul “*testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ,*” but the results were the same.

“*And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, YOUR BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN: FROM HENCEFORTH I WILL GO UNTO THE GENTILES.*” (Acts 18:5, 6).

Even at Rome he first called the Jewish leaders together but once more it was in vain, and sternly rebuking them for their obstinacy he declared, “BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT.” (Acts 28:28).

From Jerusalem to Rome it had been the same. “The acceptable year of the Lord” had ended with Israel joining the nations in rebellion against God and His Christ. With this Israel’s day was over. The time of her opportunity had passed. The result will be exactly what we find in prophecy, where “*the acceptable year of the Lord*” is followed by “*the day of vengeance of our God.*”

Israel *cannot* now accept Christ as her Messiah for the kingdom offer has been taken away. “God is not mocked.” Not until the day of vengeance will Israel mourn (Zech. 12:10) and be comforted. And not until then will the glorious kingdom of Messiah be ushered in.

THE RICHES OF GOD’S GRACE

Did you notice in the above Scriptures what happened each time as God turned from Israel?

“...WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND.” (Rom. 5:20).

“...THROUGH THEIR FALL SALVATION IS COME UNTO THE GENTILES...” (Rom. 11:11).

“... THE FALL OF THEM...THE RICHES OF THE WORLD...” (Rom. 11:12).

“...THE CASTING AWAY OF THEM...THE RECONCILING OF THE WORLD...” (Rom. 11:15).

“FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM *ALL* IN UNBELIEF, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON *ALL*.

“O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS, AND HIS WAYS PAST FINDING OUT!” (Rom. 11:32, 33).

And so it was that in God’s very judgment on Israel (as a nation) He demonstrated the exceeding riches of His grace.

As it was, neither Israel (as a nation) nor the other nations were receiving the promised blessing. Therefore God, who had “held them by the hand” now let them fall that He might offer reconciliation by grace to sinners far and wide who would put their trust in His rejected Son.

THE “GAP THEORY”

Israel’s “acceptable year” has long since passed and the day of vengeance has not even yet begun. Between these two lies a period of almost 1900 years not accounted for in prophecy.

Instead of proceeding with the prophetic program and bringing in the day of vengeance, God did something which He had never promised. He ushered in “*the dispensation of the grace of God.*”

Years ago this truth was referred to as “the gap theory,” but it is not a theory. It is a *fact* that so far there has already been a “gap” of almost 1900 years in the prophetic program.

While both “the acceptable year of the Lord” and “the day of vengeance of our God” are the subjects of *prophecy*, the dispensation of the grace of God and the reconciling of Jews and Gentiles to Himself in one body by the cross was decidedly a *mystery*, kept secret from the prophets.

See Eph. 3:1-3. “*For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.*

“*If ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD which is given to me to you-ward:*

“*How that by revelation He made known unto me THE MYSTERY...*”

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See also Col. 1:25, 26. *“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;*

“EVEN THE MYSTERY WHICH HATH BEEN HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS.”

YOUR OPPORTUNITY

God no longer sends forth a call to a nation to accept a King. *All* the nations have been given up to judgment. But in wondrous love He offers salvation full and free to His enemies everywhere,—all through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

“Henceforth,” says Paul, *“know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.*

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: WE PRAY YOU IN CHRIST’S STEAD, BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD.

“FOR HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, WHO KNEW NO SIN; THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.” (II Cor. 5:16, 20, 21).

This dispensation of God’s grace is nowhere referred to in the prophetic Scriptures. It does not belong to “the times and the seasons.”

How long will it last then?

Can you find the answer in the Scriptures? No, for every moment is a moment of grace,—pure grace.

Paul himself did not dream it would last almost 1900 years. He expected the Lord to come during his lifetime for he said *“WE look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 3:20), and *“WE which are alive and remain shall be caught up together...”* (I Thes. 4:17).

Little wonder he continues his letter to the Corinthians by saying, *“We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”* (II Cor. 6:1).

Little wonder he cries in the next verse, *“...Behold, NOW is the acceptable time; Behold, NOW is the day of salvation.”*

Once more it is a “time accepted” with God. But do not confuse this with Israel’s day. This is YOUR opportunity. And do not let that opportunity slip by, for He does not promise us so much as one hour longer. NOW is the accepted time.

We are living in the tense moments between man’s declaration of war on God and God’s counter-declaration, and the fact that He has waited for almost 1900 years to declare war should not cause us to presume that He will wait one moment longer.

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Unbeliever, NOW is your opportunity. Take advantage of it and trust in Christ as your Savior before it is too late.

Believer, NOW is the time for us to get the gospel out to the lost.

“SEE THEN THAT YE WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY, NOT AS FOOLS, BUT AS WISE,

“REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.” (Eph. 5:15, 16).