The background is a composite image. On the left, the lower portion of the Colosseum is visible, showing its iconic tiered arches. On the right, a large, classical marble bust of a man's head is shown in profile, facing left. The upper portion of the image features a map of the Roman Empire, with various regions labeled in Latin: DACIA, MYSIA, MARE, TRACIA, MARE, and others. The map is overlaid on a textured, aged parchment-like background.

ROME & THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY



Part 4: Introduction

In the first three lectures, we have seen how the Roman Republic under Julius Caesar (101-44 BC) gradually, after seventy years of civil war, evolved into what we now know as the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus (AD 63-14) achieved supreme power in the Roman state and ruled over the Mediterranean basin for over forty years until his death. During his reign, much of the civilized world was brought under this universal kingdom, thus preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ and the spread of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette notes that “our records, unsatisfactory though they are, suffice to show that by A.D. 180 Christians were in all the provinces of the Empire and in Mesopotamia.”

Introduction

As the Romans were uniting the nations of the world into a colossal empire, and the literature and culture of the Greeks from the time of Alexander the Great were being disseminated throughout the provinces, the whole world was being prepared to receive the good news about the life of Jesus of Nazareth and His vicarious death on a Roman cross in order to atone for the sins of all who would repent of their sins and place their faith in Him alone as their Savior and Lord. Listen to the way the Apostle John expressed it in the *Prologue* to his Gospel: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:11-12).



Introduction

In God's divine providence, the Mediterranean world was being prepared to receive the message of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ, and included the following conditions:

- The *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) which lasted about 200 years
- The spread of the *koine* (common) Greek throughout the Empire
- A network of 55,000 miles of Roman roads for travel & commerce
- Tolerance of a vast melting-pot of religious and philosophical ideas
- Serious moral degeneracy (cruelty to slaves, infanticide, abortion, disregard of marriage, brutal slaughter in the arenas, etc.)
- The Jewish *diaspora* with accompanying synagogues

Summary by Kenneth Scott Latourette

“Christianity arose almost contemporaneously with the Roman Empire and had the advantage of the peace and the political, cultural, commercial, and linguistic unity which that regime created and furthered. Then, too, the first period of Christianity’s expansion coincided with the weakening of many of the accustomed social, political, and religious patterns of the Mediterranean basin. A religious ferment was stirring men’s spirits.



Summary by Kenneth Scott Latourette

As the centuries passed and the decay of ancient civilization and of the Roman Empire itself continued, individuals more and more sought salvation through religious channels and old resistances to the advance of a new religion were progressively weakened. **Never before in the history of the race had conditions been so ready for the adoption of a new faith by a majority of the peoples of so large an area."**





Sola Scriptura

Now we are curious. What can we know about these conditions from God's Word? Has He revealed and preserved anything in the Scriptures that would indicate He has always been working from the beginning of time to prepare the world for the incarnation of His beloved Son? If so, where might we look? The Apostle Paul pulls back the curtain on God's divine plan and, in a phrase pregnant with meaning, reveals what we would not otherwise be capable of knowing. Let's remember that "the Bible provides information that is not available anywhere else" (R.C. Sproul). Scripture alone is the sole authority on matters of doctrine and practice.



- “But when **the fullness of the time** came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).
- “But when **the right time came**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children” (New Living Translation).

Beginning Our Investigation

- Even to a casual observer, the first question raised by this passage in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches is: What does "in the fullness of time" mean?
- What is the significance of these five words?
- A clear answer can be found by investigating two distinct Greek words that are translated by the English word *time*.

Time: Two Greek Words

Chronos

(A Stretch of Time)

&

Kairos

(A Definite Period of Time)



English Derivatives

- **Chronometer:** instrument for measuring time
- **Chronological:** arranged in the order of time
- **Chronology:** assigning events to correct dates
- **Chronometry:** the art or science of accurately measuring time
- **Synchronize:** to cause to coincide in time
- **Chronography:** the chronological arrangement of historical events
- **Chronical:** pertaining to time
- **Chronic:** lasting a long time



Chronos & Kairos

- **Chronos:** *time*, mostly in the sense of *a span or period of time*.
- “So one of the men who has accompanied us during **all the time** that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us...” (Acts 1:21).
- The word appears 53 times in the N.T.
- Chronos is time, contemplated simply as such; the succession of moments (Trench).
- *Chronos*, then, denotes a stretch of time, but *kairos* a definite period that is **marked by what transpires in it** (Lenski).
- *Kairos* is *the right point of time, the proper time or season of action, the exact or critical time* (Liddell and Scott).

Chronos & Kairos

- In Acts 1:6, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, is it at this time (*chronos*) You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus answered them, “It is not for you to know times (*chronos*) or epochs (*kairos*) which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (1:7).
- According to Liddell and Scott, *chronos* means “a definite time, a while, period, season.”
- **Chronos** embraces all possible *kairoi*, and is the larger, more inclusive term.
- It is possible to speak of *kairos chronou*, but not of the *chronos kairou*.



Chronos & Kairos

- In *kairos*, the linguistic development of the term clearly suggests the basic sense is that of the “decisive or crucial place or point,” whether spatially, materially or temporally (Kittel).
- The temporal sense is that of a “decisive moment.” There is an emphasis on the fact that it is ordained by God.
- “*Chronos* expresses simply duration, time viewed in its extension, and *kairos* a definite space of time, time with reference both to its extent and character” (F.F. Bruce).

Chronos & Kairos

“*Chronos* points to a longer duration of time; *kairos* points to a definitely limited moment of time.”

- Herman N. Ridderbos



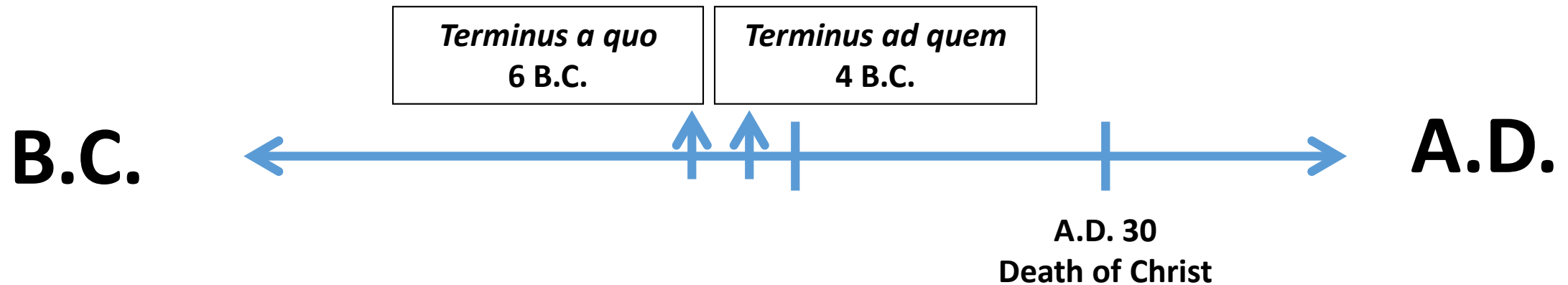
Texts with Chronos

- “Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the **time** the star appeared” (Mt. 2:7).
- “Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the **time** which he had ascertained from the magi” (Mt. 2:16).
- “Now the **time** had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she brought forth a son...” (Lk. 1:57).
- “And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of **time**” (Lk. 4:5).

Texts with Kairos

- “And behold, they cried out, saying, ‘What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the **time**?’” (Mt. 8:29).
- “At that **time** Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus” (Mt. 14:1).
- “The **time** is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...” (Mk. 1:15).

The Birth of Jesus Christ



That Specific Moment

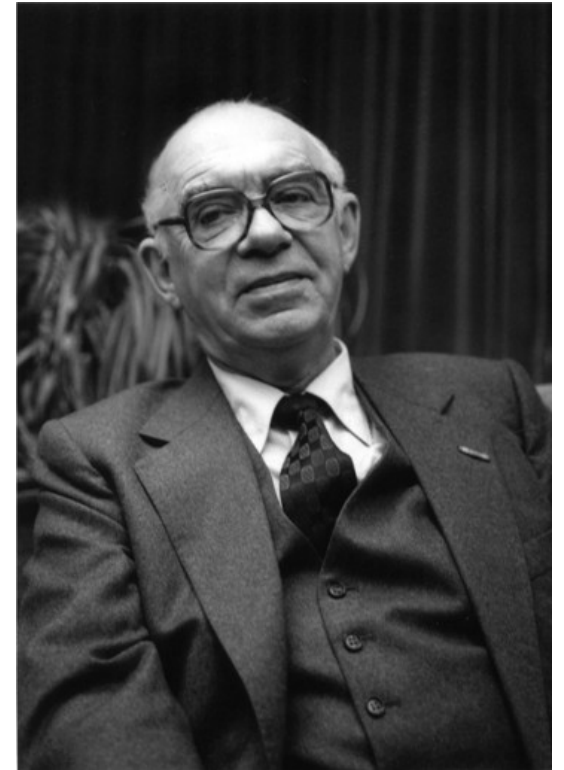
“It is God alone who fully knows why, in his inscrutable decrees, he had decided that ‘the long period of time (chronos)’ in which all the preparatory events were to occur would run out at that specific moment. It was then that he sent out from himself his Son.”

- William Hendriksen



In the *Fullness* of Time

Galatians 4:4 speaks of the end of the period of bondage under the Law. “This period of time is now spoken of as *the fullness of time*, that is to say, the moment in which the previously determined time-limit was reached. Beneath this thought lies the assumption that the time runs out according to a fixed plan, that time, in short, is governed.”



Herman N. Ridderbos
Dutch Theologian & Biblical Scholar
1909-2007



The Moment of the Pleroma

“We can ask ourselves to what extent we are also to think in this connection of a process of development taking place in time, in preparation for what would happen in the fulness of time. Now it is true that God controls time, and determines the moment of the pleroma. And this carries with it the implication that **the moment of the pleroma was the most suitable for what was now about to happen**. But no emphasis is put upon this aspect of the matter. Nor can we prove on convincing grounds why this time was the most suitable for the coming of Christ. In any event, these words lend no support for the view that the development of time should be able to explain the advent of the Son. This advent does not have its motif in what works

The Moment of the Pleroma

and ferments in time. It has its motif in what God disposes and does – though this does not at all exclude the possibility of a preparation in time. When this moment, determined by the counsel of God had come, God sent His Son” (Ridderbos).



Adoration of the Shepherds

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682)

Dr. Gerhard van Groningen

“The complete expression of God’s redemptive purposes and the outworking of these have come to mankind in the person, teaching, and deeds of Jesus Christ. In the ‘fullness of time’ (Gal. 4:4) he sealed and validated the redemption God had planned for mankind and applied to believers *before, at, and after* the time of his sojourn on earth within the course of world history.”



Gerhard van Groningen
1921-2014

Ridderbos Footnote

“According to some, the *pleroma* is used here in the active sense: ‘that which fills.’ Generally, however, it has a passive sense: that which has been completed, the fulfilled. This passive meaning suits the context well. The picture is that of a vessel that is being poured full and at a given moment is brimful. The *pleroma* is not merely that last bit that fills the vessel but the whole brimful content of the container.”



In the Fullness of Time



R.C. Sproul

“Scripture declares that Jesus was born in the ‘fullness of time.’ The word that is translated ‘fullness’ is the Greek word *pleroma*. The English word *fullness* does not quite capture the meaning of this word. *Pleroma* refers to a fullness that is absolute, a fullness that reaches its bursting point. When we fill a glass of water, we do not fill it to the rim. A small, empty space is left lest we spill the contents when we lift the glass to drink. The fullness of *pleroma* would be more like what happens when we put the glass under a spigot and turn on the water and let it

In the Fullness of Time

run. The glass fills up and then begins to spill over the side. In this case there is no room left in the glass for any more water. The 'fullness of time' means that **history was ripe for the birth of Christ**. All of the *chronos* of the past and all of the *kairoi* that had gone before converged in this moment. **Jesus was born at the precise second and in the precise place that God had ordained from the foundation of the world**. Luke records it with these words: 'So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.' But it was not only the days of Mary's pregnancy, the normal period of gestation, that was completed. **It was the years, centuries, and millennia that had been completed in preparation for this moment."**

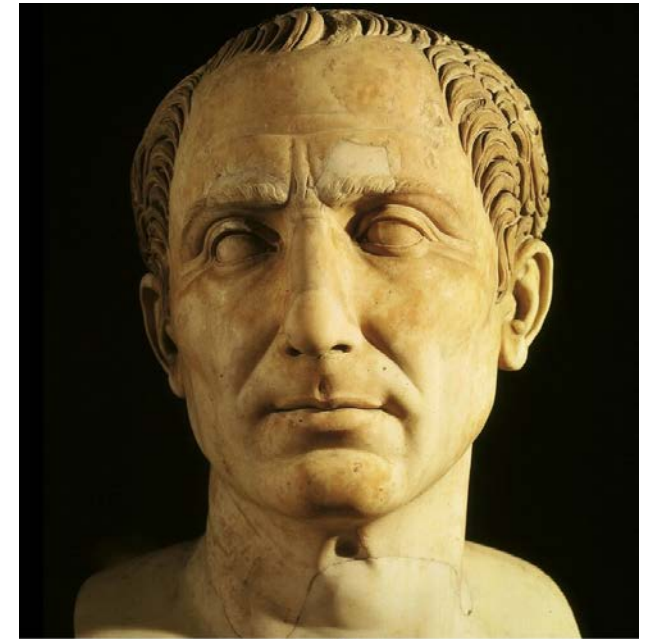


John Calvin

“‘When the fullness of time came.’ He proceeds with his comparison and applies to his purpose ‘the time appointed by the Father.’ But at the same time, he shows that the time which had been ordained by the providence of God was seasonable and fit. That is the right season and that is the best method of acting which the providence of God directs. Therefore the right time for the Son of God to be revealed to the world was for God alone to judge and determine. This ought to restrain all curiosity, if any man, not content with the secret purpose of God, should dare to dispute why Christ did not appear sooner.”

Remarks by Suetonius (AD 69-after 122)

“The reign of Augustus is distinguished by the most extraordinary event recorded in history, either sacred or profane, the nativity of the Saviour of mankind; which has since introduced a new epoch into the chronology of all Christian nations. The commencement of the new era being the most flourishing period of the Roman empire, a general view of the state of knowledge and taste of this period, may here not be improper.”



PENGUIN CLASSICS

SUETONIUS

The Twelve Caesars

Concluding Questions

1. Do you tend to think about things broadly or narrowly?
2. Do you tend to think more personally or globally?
3. Regarding government and politics, is your concern about how elections will personally impact you or about the impact on world missions and the spread of the gospel throughout the world?
4. Is the cause of Jesus Christ at the center of your worldview?
5. Do you periodically step away from your day-to-day life and take some time to reflect on your *entire life*? What do you see?
6. What is God doing in America at this time in our history?