

Do you ever wonder what it might have been like to live in a different time? You may be reading a book or watching TV and think I wonder what it would have been like to live then. You may even go further and think I wish I had lived then it looks better than now.

I have done that but I have to say I think we are privileged to live in the times we do.

I was hearing the other day of a woman of 101 living in the USA who had never seen the Ocean. In today's world with relative ease of transport that is unusual and yet go back say 100 years and people never left their village. Then we take into account so many things like the advances in medical science, communication and so on I do think we are privileged to live in these times.

Peter writing to these Christians who were dispersed across the Middle East wrote that they were privileged to live in the times they lived in. Now they may have disagreed with Peter because, as we see from 1:6, they were suffering persecution. However he was convinced that they and we are privileged to live AD rather than BC.

In a sense he sums it up in 1 Peter 1:20, "He (that is Jesus) was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

We like those Christians live in the last days, the days after the birth of Jesus but before his return. We have the privilege of living after his first coming, which Charles Wesley described in the carol 'Hark the herald angels sing' as "late in time behold him come".

As we look at the Bible's history we can understand why Wesley described his coming as "late in time". 1 Peter 1:20 reminds them that the fact that Jesus would be born was decided before the creation of the world. God the Father promised to Abraham that he would receive a people, a place and be a blessing to all nations and it is through Jesus those promise have come to final completion with a people who span every nation, a place which is heaven open to all through Jesus Christ and the blessing and rule of God which eventually will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. But there was a long time between Abraham and Jesus. However, the Bible doesn't allow us to say that God was slow or that Jesus should have come earlier. Paul in Gal 4:4 makes this clear, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son". Jesus came at the right time, that planned and appointed by God the Father, just as he will return at the right time, that planned and appointed by God the Father.

However it was "late in time" in that there were many centuries between the promise and the event. Living in that time was not great as they continually looked for the day of the Messiah's coming. Isaiah described what that would be like in Is 9:2, "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light."

He saw the days in which he lived as like living in Old Basing, in the darkness and looking for the coming of the light.

Now, as Peter says in 1:20, Jesus has come, the light has shone, God is revealed in a new and living way for these Christians and their salvation. They lived in privileged times as do we.

If we look back to 1 Peter 1:10-12 we will see something of what that means.

### **1. the prophets didn't know v10-11**

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.”

What Peter was saying is that in the Old Testament we read of the prophets who were moved by God's Spirit as he spoke to them. They spoke of the Messiah who was to come. However, so much was not revealed to them. They did not know. They did not know when he would come. They did not know in what circumstances he would come or in which his life would be lived. To use Isaiah's words they were working in the dark. Limited revelation was theirs.

Yes they wanted to know more and Peter says they “searched intently and with the greatest care”.

By which I think he means that they gave serious thought to the revelation they were given but to so many questions they had no answers. As we look at v11 we see they were “trying to find out the time and circumstances”. They knew nothing of when the Messiah would come or in what situation.

We are perhaps familiar with some of the words of the prophets about the Messiah who was to come: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit..... In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious” Isaiah 11:1&10; and then from Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Yes they did know a Messiah would come, however, though they tried to understand when he would come and how he would come, this was not revealed to them. They didn't know the time or manner of his coming.

During this season of advent as we wait for the return of Jesus as King and Judge we are in a bit of the same boat. We know he will come but we do not know how or when. Peter here speaks of how the prophets, “searched intently and with the greatest care” and certainly many have done that and sometimes with incredible ingenuity, to work out when Jesus will return. However the end point is we do not know. As with the prophets to so many questions we have no answers. So in one way our

times are not much better than that of the prophets but we do know the Messiah has come and so we can say that their times were not as good as ours.

## **2. The prophets did know v11-12**

However there were things that the prophets did know. V11 speaks of, “the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.” They knew something of what would befall the Messiah. We have a clear view of his sufferings from Isaiah 53:3, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” and yet also of his glory from Isaiah 52:13-15, “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him - his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.”

So here we see something that the prophets did have revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. They knew that the Messiah would suffer before he was glorified. However, as we see in v12, this was not revealed to the prophets for their benefit but for the benefit of these readers to show them that the Messiah had suffered even as they were but that his suffering led to glory as theirs would also. The prophets knew so little and, as Peter says here, even what they did know, v12, was not for their benefit but for the benefit of those who would come after the Messiah and who would become his followers that is these Christians Peter was writing to and you and I.

In one sense it is a little like writing a will. There is so much that you don't know, for example how much your estate will be and the whole is for the benefit of those who will read it later after you have gone.

What the prophets knew gave them some understanding but its main purpose was for those who lived after the Messiah had come so that we might know that this is the Messiah because his life, ministry, death and resurrection matched that which God had spoken about through the prophets. While I was typing this I was interrupted by my son Skyping from the USA. He spoke about needing to go on line and order presents. Some of us may still prefer to go to a shop and look at the items and see that they match what we want. When you order on line it is only after the gift has arrived and been unpacked that you can go back and check that it matches what you wanted.

For these Christians and for us we can look at Jesus and say is he really the Messiah, God's chosen one and we can go back to the prophets and see what God said through them and see how the birth life and death of Jesus matches what they foretold of the Messiah. What was revealed to them was for us, v20 he “was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

What they knew, what was revealed to them, was for our benefit in that we can see that this is the Christ of God who was there with the father before the creation of the world spoken of by the prophets but revealed in these last days. Their times were not as good as ours.

### **3. He has been revealed to us v12**

“they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”

These Christians and we know what the prophets did not about the nature, life and death of Jesus the Christ. To them and us it has been revealed through the gospel. “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2).

We live post Jesus with all the benefits and blessings that have come to us through the gospel, through which we know God’s love and salvation. As Peter writes even the angels have not had the joy of hearing the gospel and finding salvation. Yes these Christian may be suffering and may feel their times were bad but they and we are privileged people – I hope we realise that.

### **4. This is our God**

‘Late in time behold him come’ speaks to us of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It reminds us that our God is **the God of history**. The Father was moving the history of the world to that point, that time, when it was right to send his son into the world. The history of the world is in God’s hands. Our times are in his hands. We may at times think that life is tough and it would have been better to have lived at a different time or even be someone else but Peter reminds us that no matter what trials or suffering we are going through we live in the best of times as far as the history of the world is concerned in that we live after the coming of Jesus the Christ.

It also reminds us that God is **the God of salvation**. Jesus the Son of God came into the world as a Saviour. The message of the angel to Joseph was “you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt1:21). This is our greatest need and God the Father has met it through the Son – what more can we want. We may write our Christmas lists of gifts we might like but we have been given the greatest gift, the offer of salvation through Jesus. We live in the best of times for we know of salvation.

It also reminds us that God is **the God of revelation**. God the Holy Spirit has revealed to these Christians and to us who Jesus is. We have the full revelation of God in Jesus. “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1). God the Holy Spirit has in these last days revealed to humanity God the Father’s love and grace shown to us through God the Son for our salvation. Unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes we cannot see Jesus as who he is and unless the Holy Spirit opens our hearts we cannot receive him as Saviour and King.

'Late in time behold him come' – it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to behold to see that Jesus has come for our salvation. We live in the best of times for we know, it has been revealed to us in a new and living way.

This is our God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, the God of history, salvation and revelation.

So in just a few moments as we sing Hark the herald angels and as we sing that line 'late in time behold him come', I hope we will see Wesley was not referring to Jesus like a bus that is well past the time when it should have arrived but the one who came at the time determined by God the Father but a time unknown even by the prophets who foretold his coming.

We have been privileged to have it revealed that he has come and that in him we have salvation and life. We live in these the best of times and yet we too look forward to a coming that has yet to be revealed to us.