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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.

—Exodus 30:11–16

The Atonement Money

On Mount Sinai God taught Moses the gospel of the atonement money. The atonement money stood as a perpetual “memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD” (Ex. 30:16) that God had purchased his people out of certain death in Egypt and bought them unto himself as his covenant possession. The atonement money thus teaches us the wonder of God’s gracious redemption of his church through Jesus Christ. Let us listen in on this good news as God teaches Moses the gospel of the atonement money.

The atonement money was to be paid whenever Israel conducted a national census. In a national census each adult male twenty years old and above who was able to fight in war was counted. Thus, for example, the census two years after Israel left Egypt revealed 603,550 men “that were able to go forth to war in Israel” (Num. 1:45–46). Each man who was numbered would pay half a shekel as “a ransom for his soul unto the LORD” (Ex. 30:12). The half shekel that each man paid was “the atonement money of the children of Israel” and would be given “for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation” (v. 16).

The atonement money was a glorious testimony to the children of Israel of the great things that God had done for them. For the atonement money testified that God had purchased the children of Israel out of their house of bondage in Egypt. In Egypt the people had been slaves. In Egypt the people had died. But God had delivered his people out of their bondage by his mighty hand and stretched-out arm. He had rained down upon the Egyptians ten mighty plagues, by which he had destroyed Egypt and freed his captive people. The atonement money would be a perpetual testimony to Israel “that there be no plague among them” (Ex. 30:12) as there had been among Egypt.

Not only did the atonement money testify that God had delivered his people from bondage, but it also testified that God had purchased his people as his covenant possession. When kings claim a people as their own, they receive tribute from them. The atonement money paid to God was a perpetual testimony to Israel that the one true God was their God, and they were his people. The atonement money was not an offering to a foreign power but “an offering unto the LORD” (Ex. 30:15).

The fulfillment of the atonement is our Lord Jesus Christ. He has paid the ransom price of

his life to deliver us from our sins. “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). His blood was shed for all his own for the remission of our sins, by which we are brought unto God. “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (26:28). Our Lord did not purchase us with shekels and gerahs of silver but with his precious blood.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation

received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (I Pet. 1:18–19)

The child of God, thus redeemed, gives not only his shekels but also his life to God in gratitude for what God has done. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article CLV: The New King and His Kingdom: In the Fulness of Time (continued)

“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.”—Eph. 1:10

The question, then, is, first of all: What is the denotation of the expression “fulness of time”?

The word “fulness,” or in Greek “pleroma,” occurs frequently in the Bible. But it is at least doubtful whether it ever is employed in exactly the same sense in which it is current among us in the English language. With us the word is used in the abstract sense simply to denote the condition of being full. But in Scripture it has a far more concrete significance. It is used both in an active and in a passive sense to denote either that which fills (active) or that which is filled (passive). If I have a vessel with a ten-quart capacity, I might refer to the entire contents of such a vessel by the expression “the fulness of the vessel,” meaning “that which fills it.” Or, again, supposing it already contains nine quarts, I might also call the one quart that must be added to fill the receptacle

“its fulness,” again in the sense “that which fills it.” In the same active sense of that which fills something else the word occurs frequently in the Bible. Thus we read in Matt. 9:16: “No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, for that which is put on to fill it taketh from the garment and the rent is made worse.” Here we read in the original literally: “No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, for its fulness taketh from the garment and the rent is made worse.” Here the word “fulness” is evidently employed in the active sense. It denotes “that which fills the gap in the old garment,” “the fulness of the gap or rent.” In the same sense the word is used in Mark 6:43: “And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments and of the fishes.” In this passage the literal translation would be: “And they took up ‘the fulness’ of twelve baskets,” evidently meaning “that which fills twelve baskets.” So also very plainly in 1 Cor. 10:26: “For the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (“that which fills the earth”). In all these illustrations

the meaning is not doubtful. It is employed every time in the active sense and denotes that which fills something else.

The same expression, however, is also employed in the passive sense, and then it denotes not that which fills, but that which is filled. In this sense you may find it employed very plainly in Eph. 1:23: "Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Reference is had here to the Church of Christ as his body. That Church is called "the fulness of him that filleth all in all," namely, of God in Christ. Now, it is very plain that the meaning here is that the Church is filled, and as such it is the fulness of him that filleth all in all. The word is used here not in the active, but in the passive sense. It does not denote that which fills, but that which is filled. In the same sense, we take it, the expression occurs in Eph. 3:19, where the same apostle writes: "And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Or, again, in Eph. 4:13: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Here also the expression evidently means "of the being filled with Christ," and is, therefore, used in a passive sense.

"Fulness," therefore, as it is used in the Word of God, must not simply be taken in the same abstract sense in which it is employed in our language. It denotes concretely either that which fills or that which is filled by something else.

Now, let us ask the further question: In what sense must the word be understood in the phrase "fulness of time"? There are some passages in Scripture itself that may help us to determine the meaning of the word in this expression. Thus we read in Gen. 29:21: "And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled that I may go in unto her." The days are evidently conceived of as a measure that is filled. The fulness of days here would have to be understood in the active sense, namely, as that which filled the days Jacob referred to. Thus we also read in Mark 1:14, 15: "Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel and saying,

The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel." The meaning is that something is filling the time rapidly, yea, that the time is already being filled for the coming of the Kingdom of God. The moment that Jesus is preaching belongs to the period of the fulness of time. Time is fulfilled. So that also here the meaning would be active. And if Jesus had said: "the fulness of time has come" instead of "time is fulfilled," the expression would plainly signify "that which filled the time." And, lastly, we have a similar illustration in John 7:8, where the Savior says to his disciples: "Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up unto this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled." Fulness of time would also in this case have to be understood in the active sense as that which fills the time. The expression itself we find in Gal. 4:4 and Eph. 1:10.

In the former passage we read the well known words: "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." The context shows plainly that Paul is thinking of the time of bondage, of the old dispensation. That is "the time." And this period is conceived of as a receptacle that must be fulfilled before Christ may come, before God will send for his Son. Fulness of time also in this case means, "that which fills the time." And the moment of the fulness of time is that particular moment when the very last of all that was to go into the period of the old dispensation, of bondage, had been realized. Just at that moment God sent forth his Son. The moment of his coming filled the time of the old dispensation to overflow into the new.

The passage in Eph. 1:10 has substantially the same meaning, but conceives of the fulness of time as an entire period, as a dispensation. We read there: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." We notice in the first place that in this passage the Apostle Paul uses the plural instead of the singular. In Gal. 4:4 he speaks of the fulness of "time," here of the fulness of "times." The difference is that in the

former passage the apostle conceives of the entire old dispensation as one long period. He does not divide it into different periods. But in the latter passage this is different. God rules over his Kingdom and covenant as it is in the world. Essentially this Kingdom of God is always in the world and is always the same. The people of God in the old dispensation were saved even as we. But the manner in which God rules over his house in the world differs from age to age, according to the stage of development his Kingdom has reached. The dispensations therefore, the way in which God dispenses his grace, are not the same. And the apostle in Eph. 1:10 is thinking of these different dispensations. There is the period before the flood. There is the period up to the calling of Abraham. There is the period up to Sinai. And there is the period up to the coming of Christ. Different periods there are and different dispensations. Now, the period of the New Testament is the last of all. It fills the dispensations. It fulfills time. When it began, the last of God's dispensations went into realization. It, therefore, fills all time. It is the dispensation of the fulness of times. But even with this difference of meaning from Gal. 4:4 the sense is substantially the same. The expression "fulness of time" means "that which fills time." It is understood in the active sense of the word. "With reference to time it (fulness) means completely—the particular time that completes a long period or

a previous series of seasons" (S. D. E. Salmon on Eph. 1:10 in "Expositor's Greek Testament").

But if this is the meaning of the expression, another question naturally arises. The fulness of time is that which fills or completes time. The question arises: Fills it with what? Surely, such a moment cannot be arbitrarily chosen only to fill a certain period. Time is filled with events and developments. And fulness of time must mean that particular moment when all the events and developments in the history of Israel and of the world that were to fill the period of the old dispensation were actually realized and had been accomplished. But thus the further question also arises: What were those events that must happen before Christ came and could come? What were the developments in history necessary for the coming of the Son of God? Calvin on Eph. 1:10 thinks "that no man may inquire why one time rather than another was selected, the apostle anticipates such curiosity by calling the appointed period the fulness of time, the fit and proper season, as he also did in a former epistle." Now, surely, fulness of time also means the fit and proper season. But exactly because of this, the phrase "fulness of time" gives rise to the question: Why was that moment, the moment of the fulness of time, more fit and more proper than any period in history?

This question still remains to be answered.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

