

THE TIME IS UP!

by Carl McMurray

Time limits are sometimes difficult things to work with. Who has not felt the press of time in getting some chore finished, or in preparing for someone to arrive, or leave? The Lord has set time limits on occasion and they likewise have proven difficult for some to accept. Just like an expired parking meter the Bible reveals to us that the time is up in some areas, and just like that meter, some have difficulty accepting it and moving along.

Zechariah 13:1-6 is an example of a time limit, set and prophesied by God. Verse one identifies the time of fulfillment as when the “fountain” for “sin and impurity” will be opened in Jerusalem. The time for fulfillment then is obviously the first century, when the cleansing fountain of Christ’s blood is opened by the preaching of the gospel. Note what verses 2 and 3 tell us.

“‘And it will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. And it will come about that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the Lord’; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies.’” Zechariah 13:2-3

There was coming a day when prophets (and demons) would be removed from the land. True prophecy is so much a gift from God that when this gift is removed and a man continues to claim it, even the parents of a false prophet would be able to see and know the deceit being practiced. Even his parents would reprove and attack him for his deceit. It is baffling that something can be so plainly stated as to when it would end (in the same time period the fountain was opened) and people still misunderstand. The New Testament verifies this same time period for the ending of prophecy (and all other miraculous spiritual gifts) in Ephesians 4:8-16 and 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. In these two passages we are taught that the reason for their passing is that 1) their purpose is fulfilled (i.e. maturing the saints to a certain level) and 2) their need is fulfilled (i.e. being replaced by an unchanging written word. Zechariah reminds us that they were never intended to be permanent aspects of serving God—there was a time limit put on them. The two passages above simply explain why and how that time limit was reached.

Today there are many who are still trying to park their spiritual car at a meter whose time is up. The Spirit taught in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we should be walking by “...faith, not by sight.” As our Lord makes His will known to us in His word, we should be satisfied without having to see the dead raised, the blind seeing, and the sick healed.

Isaiah 35:5-6 is where the Jews were told that miracles would be the sign of the coming kingdom, the way of holiness for the ransomed people of God. That ministry of miraculous power was begun by Jesus at age 30 and in Acts 1:8 He reminded His apostles that they too would receive power. Hebrews 2:3-4 explains that this power was given to confirm their words. That confirmation continued as needed while the news of the gospel spread throughout all creation (Colossians 1:6, 23) but that confirmation was never intended to continue forever.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit (an immersion in power) was only promised to the apostles. Although they laid hands upon and imparted miraculous gifts to others, no others ever received the power to pass the Spirit in that way. That gift of “giving” ended with the apostles. Why? Because it was no longer needed. Confirmation was not needed because God’s word had already been confirmed. Prophecy was not needed because all had already been revealed and written down, Jude 3. The kingdom was established, the order was set. The plan was in motion. Nothing else was needed, save to preach it and obey it. That is why in Acts 20:32, Paul left the elders at Ephesus, not looking for miracles, but depending on “...the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

For miracles, the time is up. Those who wait for one wait in vain today. God has told us already what to do. We simply need to do it. Those who claim them today either do so innocently (not knowing that a Bible miracle was actually a supernatural occurrence) or they do so deceitfully (knowing better but doing so for money, peer pressure, men’s praise, or a host of other reasons).

The alarm clock has clicked on, the meter has turned over, and time ran out in the first century on those gifts of spiritual childhood that were given to lead us to the maturity of faith. Go to your Bible and determine what it is that God desires of you. You’ll not be left unsatisfied and when the time is up for this life – you’ll be ready, not still waiting for something long gone.