

The Silent Years-The Intertestamental Period

The years between the Old Testament book of Malachi and the beginning book of the New Testament, Matthew, is sometimes call the *Intertestamental Period* or *the Silent Years*. This is the time between the testaments.

The 400 years of silence refers to the time between the Old Testament and New Testament, during which God did not speak to the Jewish people. The 400 years of silence began with the warning that closed the Old Testament: Malachi 4:5-6 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* and ended with the coming of John the Baptist, the Messiah's forerunner.

At the time of Malachi's warning, about 430 B.C., the Jews had returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity (as merchants, not shepherds). The Medo-Persian Empire still ruled Israel, and the temple had been rebuilt. Both the Law and the priesthood of Aaron's line had been restored, and the Jews had given up their worship of idols. Nevertheless, Malachi's warning was not without cause. The Jewish people were mistreating their wives, marrying pagans and not tithing, and the priests were neglecting the temple and not teaching the people the ways of God. In short, the Jews were not honoring God.

In 333 B.C., Israel fell to the Greeks, and in 323 B.C. it fell to the Egyptians. The Jews generally were treated well throughout those reigns, and they adopted the Greek language and many of the Greek customs and manners, and in Egypt the Old Testament was translated into Greek. That translation, the Septuagint, came into widespread use (and is quoted frequently in the New Testament).

Jewish law and the priesthood remained more or less intact until Antiochus the Great of Syria captured Israel in 204 B.C. He and his successor, Antiochus Epiphanes, persecuted the Jews and sold the priesthood, and in 171 B.C. Epiphanes desecrated the Holy of Holies. This desecration resulted in an uprising by Judas Maccabeus of the priestly line of Aaron, and in 165 B.C. the Jews recaptured Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. However, fighting continued between the Jews and the Syrians until the Romans gained control of Israel in 63 B.C., at which time Pompey walked into the Holy of Holies, once again shocking and embittering the Jews. In 47 B.C., Caesar installed Antipater, a descendant of Esau, as procurator of Judea, and Antipater subsequently appointed his two sons as kings over Galilee and Judea.

As the New Testament opens, Antipater's son, Herod the Great, a descendant of Esau, was king, and the priesthood was politically motivated and not of the line of Aaron. Politics also resulted in the development of two major factions, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees favored the liberal attitudes and practices of the Greeks. They held to only the Torah as regards religion but like all aristocrats they did not think God should have any part in governing the nation. The Pharisees were

conservative zealots who, with the help of the scribes, developed religious law to the point where the concerns and care of people were essentially meaningless. Additionally, synagogues, new places of worship and social activity, had sprouted up all over the country, and religious and civil matters were governed by the lesser and the greater Sanhedrins, the greater Sanhedrin being comprised of a chief priest and seventy other members that handed out justice, sometimes by 39 lashes administered with full force.

Between the time of Malachi and the coming of the Messiah, several prophecies were fulfilled, including the 2,300 days of desecration between 171 and 165 B.C. (Daniel 8:14). However, the people did not put to good use either the fulfilled prophecies nor the 400 years the nation was given to study Scripture, to seek God (Psalm 43-44), and to prepare for the coming Messiah. In fact, those years blinded and deafened the nation to the point where most of the Jews could not even consider the concept of a humble Messiah (Zechariah 9:9; Isaiah 6:10; John 12:40).

Almost two millennia have passed since the New Testament canon was completed, and though the Word is full of grace and truth, and though the birth, life, and death of Jesus fulfilled a staggering array of prophecies, the Jews as a people have yet to open their eyes and ears. But Jesus is coming again, and one day a remnant will both see and hear.