

The 400 Years of Silence: Jewish History During the Intertestamental Period

The Persian Period: 430 - 332 B.C.

430 B.C. – The Jews were under Persian rule after their Babylonian captivity, they received Malachi's warning against their adultery, disrespectful worship and mismanagement of the temple and are left with this promise in Malachi 3:1, "*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*" This is repeated again in Malachi 4:5-6, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*" These verses prophesy the coming of John the Baptist.

The Greek Period: 333 - 165 B.C.

333 B.C. – Alexander the Great, a 23 year old student of Aristotle, conquered Persia. Israel became a part of the Greek Empire. Israel adopts Greek language and culture, which is referred to as Hellenism. "*Hellēn*" in Greek means "a Greek".

323 B.C. – The death of Alexander the Great resulted in the division of the Grecian Empire into multiple smaller kingdoms. Israel was then under the reign of Ptolemies of Egypt. Jewish law and the priesthood remained intact.

250 B.C. – The Pentateuch was translated into Greek in Egypt, the rest of the Old Testament was translated into Greek around 130 B.C. The entirety of the OT translated into Greek is known as the Septuagint which is often quoted in the New Testament. This paved the way for the spread of the gospel, making the Old Testament easily understood in what was the universal language of the time.

204 B.C. – Israel was captured by Antiochus the Great of Syria (III), ending the Ptolemaic rule.

171 B.C. – Antiochus the Great was replaced by Antiochus the IV, who chose to be called Epiphanes, meaning "god manifest". He persecuted the Jews and sold the priesthood to the highest bidder willing to submit to the Hellenistic worldview. Epiphanes banned the Jewish faith, destroyed Jerusalem, murdered Jews who were unwilling to give up their faith, and desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig (non-kosher) on the Jewish altar to Zeus. This results in an uprising by Mattathias Maccabeus, a priest, and his four sons, one of whom is Judas Maccabeus of the line of Aaron. They are nicknamed the Maccabees meaning "hammers".

171 - 165 B.C. – The 2,300 days of desecration are fulfilled as foretold in Daniel 8:13-14 "*Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state."*

The Maccabean Period (The Century of Independence): 165 - 63 B.C.

165 B.C. – The Jews recaptured Jerusalem under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus and cleansed the temple, which is commemorated by the celebration of Hanukkah. The Jews and the Syrians continue to fight for power.

153 B.C. – Peace was made between Alexander Balas, Seleucid king of Syria and Judas Maccabees' successor and brother, Jonathan. These events are recorded in the Apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees.

142 B.C. – Simon Maccabeus, another brother of Judas and Jonathan, gained full independence and Judea became a semi-independent state.

The Roman Period: 63 B.C. - A.D. 636

63 B.C. – The Romans conquered Jerusalem under the rule of Pompey the Great. This put all of Judea under the control of the Caesars. Pompey walked through the Holy of Holies, establishing dominance and infuriating the Jews.

47 B.C. – Caesar installed Antipater, a descendant of Esau, as procurator of Judea, and Antipater appointed his two sons as kings over Galilee and Judea.

37 B.C. – Antipater's son assumed leadership, this was Herod the Great. He is biblically known in Matthew 2:16 *"Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under..."* Herod was appointed king of Judea by Rome and began the expansion of the second temple. The priesthood was no longer the right and responsibility of Aarons's descendants but was politically established. These politics resulted in the emergence of the Pharisees, those who opposed Hellenization, and the Sadducees, those who supported Hellenization. At this time synagogues were built across the country as smaller places of worship and civil activity.

27 B.C. – The official founding of the Roman Empire. Though Rome itself was founded in 753 B.C. Roman rule extended to the reaches of the civilized world at the time, which by today's geography included Southern Europe, Northern Africa and Western Asia. The Romans had begun building roads in 312 B.C. By now they had established networks that spanned the empire and later allowed for the rapid spread of the gospel.

20 B.C. – Herod began rebuilding the temple, it is called Herod's Temple, John 2:20 *"The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?'"*

5 B.C. – The birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus. God is no longer silent, nor is He speaking through prophets, but through His Son. Hebrews 1:1-2, *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."*

The prophecy foretelling the coming of Elijah in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the first book of the New Testament as we see in Matthew 11:13-14, *"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come."*

Sources:

Halley's Bible Handbook

ESV Study Bible

NLT Study Bible

<https://www.gotquestions.org/400-years-of-silence.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Judas-Maccabeus.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/intertestamental-period.html>

<https://www.theexaltedchrist.com/church-history/intertestamental-period-explained-400-years>

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-happened-during-the-400-years-of-silence-between-the-old-and-new-testaments.html>