**Understanding The Years Of Silence**

Without knowing and understanding the events that occur between Malachi 4:6 and Matthew 1:1, many of the details of the events recorded in the New Testament can become confusing. In this lesson, we aim to bridge the gap of unwritten history between the last writings in Malachi and the earliest time periods described in the New Testament. Along the way we will examine two major aspects of history to accomplish this goal: People and events in world history & the influence that these had on Judaism. This will help us to understand why many things are so different in the New Testament (e.g. Roman Domination Over The Jews, Various Geographical References (e.g. Judea, Galilee, etc.), Greek Culture & Language, Synagogues, Sects (Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians), and The Sanhedrin Council).

**I. The Condition Of The Jews In 400 B.C.**

A. Just 200 years earlier, the nation of Judah had been taken captive and their cities demolished by Babylon.

B. After a 70-year period of punishment, the Jews are allowed to return to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus of the Persian Empire (which had just destroyed Babylon).

C. Over the course of the next 130 years, tens of thousands of Jews return to Jerusalem to reconstruct the temple and the wall around the city.

D. By 400 BC, though a small, Jewish state had been established in Jerusalem (and the Law and rituals reinstituted), it remained under Persian rule.

**II. The Inter-Testament Periods (Fulfillments of Prophecies in Daniel 2, 7-9)**

A. The Persian Period: 397 BC – 333 BC

* 1. Commenced under the decree of Cyrus for the Jews to return to Jerusalem to reconstruct the temple and lasted until Alexander the Great conquered Persia.
  2. At the end of Malachi, the Jews were still under the dominion of the Persian Empire and would continue to be for another sixty years.
  3. Through the years, the high priest of the Jews was given considerably more civil power in addition to his religious powers, though he continued to be subject to Persia.
  4. In general, Persia was tolerant of the Jews and their religious beliefs, offering them relative freedom.

B. The Greek Period: 333 BC – 323 BC

* 1. At the age of twenty, Alexander the Great began to transform the world by marching eastward, conquering virtually everything in his path.
  2. He not only spared Jerusalem when he marched through the land, but he also offered sacrifices to God and listened to Daniel’s prophecies of him.
  3. The Jews were offered full citizenship rights under the Greek empire of Alexander the Great.
  4. As a result of his demonstration of respect for the Jews and God, the Jews developed pro-Greek sentiments, which influenced them significantly as time progressed.

C. The Egyptian Period: 323 BC – 204 BC

* 1. Alexander the Great died at age 33, leaving his four generals, Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Cassander, and Selenus to divide and rule his empire separately.
  2. Ptolemy and his successors became ruler over both the land of Jews & Egypt.
  3. At first, the Ptolemaic empire dealt harshly with the Jews, but afterward became more tolerant of them.
  4. Greek culture and language became more pervasive throughout the land, but notably among the Jews.
  5. It was at this time that the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament was made from Hebrew to Greek.

D. The Syrian Period: 204 BC – 165 BC

* 1. Following Ptolemy Philopater’s death, his successor, Ptolemy Ephiphanes, was only five years old.
  2. Antiochus the Great (ruler of the Seleucids) then invaded the Ptolemaic empire, annexing it and expanding Syria.
  3. At this time, Palestine was divided into five sections (which we see referenced in the New Testament): Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, Trachonitis
  4. Antiochus the Great was extremely harsh toward the Jews, but still allowed them to live under their own laws.
  5. However, with the ascension of Antiochus Epiphanes (175 BC – 164 BC), this changed for the worse.
  6. In 170 BC, Jerusalem was ransacked.
     1. The temple was stripped and rededicated to Jupiter
     2. The wall was torn down
     3. The Jewish religion was banned
     4. Pigs were offered on the altar
     5. The Jews were subjected to monstrous cruelties

E. The Maccabean Period – 165 BC – 63 BC

* 1. The cruelties inflicted upon them by Antiochus Ephiphanes eventually incited resistance and revolution.
  2. Judas Maccabeus (called by the Hebrew word for “hammer”) led a revolt against Antiochus, eventually recaptured Jerusalem, & refurnished temple.
  3. The feast, which celebrates the rededication of the temple to God, was observed as the Feast of the Dedication, & first took place on December 25th.
  4. Other fighting took place during this time, however, for the most part, the Jewish nation remained independent throughout this period of time.

F. The Roman Period – 63 BC and Onward

* 1. In 63 BC, the Jewish state became a Roman province through a siege of Jerusalem that lasted three months.
  2. Eventually, the siege by the Roman general, Pompey, ended with Pompey defiling the Most Holy Place of the temple, placing hatred toward the Romans in the hearts of many of the Jews.
  3. At this point, the Herodian family appears on the scene, as Antipater (the father of the Herod who reigned at the time of Jesus’ birth) was placed as governor of Galilee.
  4. Herod was appointed to be king of the Jews by Rome, and attempted to get along with them.

**III. Synagogues**

A. In the New Testament, there are numerous mentions of these gathering places that had not been used before.

B. Recall that the reason that the people went into captivity was because of their obsessive idolatry.

C.
Following their release, the Jews became extremely dedicated to God and obeying His laws. They wanted to ensure they were doing exactly as the Law commanded.

D.
One issue that arose from captivity was that many Jews were versed in Aramaic, not Hebrew (cf. Neh. 8:8).

E.
The synagogues functioned as places of instruction and teaching, though not necessarily worship.

F.
As time went on, translations of law became expositions. This gradual process over time resulted in the tradition of oral law growing to “explain” written law. However, from that time, also, there began to form that elaborate system of interpretations, amplifications and additional regulations of which the Judaism of our Lord's time was the result.

**IV. Development Of Sects**

A. Scribes

* 1. Scribes in the New Testament are generally connected with evil or hard-hearted people (especially Pharisees).
  2. Scribes existed during the Old Testament time, however their role was apparently much more subdued.
  3. “Definite rule” needed to be extracted from the law that covered virtually every aspect of daily life.
  4. In order to create this detailed and complex code, experts (scribes) made the study of the law their careers.
  5. These men are sometimes called “lawyers” in the NT.
  6. Ezra seems to be the first scribe that is elevated, as we see him reading the law in Nehemiah 8.

B. Pharisees

* 1. Though they are frequently mentioned with the scribes, the Pharisees were a completely separate group of Jews.
  2. The Pharisees had a sense of “separatism” that may have begun when the foreign wives were put away during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 10:28f).
  3. What may have prompted the Pharisees to come together was the formation of an opposition group, the Sadducees, who had a much more physical view.
  4. The mark of a Pharisee was that he always sought to add to the law more detail than was already there. Ritualist – clearly seen throughout the Gospels. Religion and salvation were made to be a highly complicated matter.
  5. Though they were few (6,000 during the time of Herod), they had a great deal of influence.

C. Sadducees

* 1. They were diametrically opposed to the Pharisees (Matt. 22:23).
  2. This group probably began as a social clique, and could be labeled as an “aristocratic” class of people.
  3. Unlike the Pharisees who clung to it, the Sadducees completely rejected the Oral Law, and even held much of the Written Law with great skepticism (they denied the existence of angels, spirits, and the resurrection.) It is obvious why they would hate Jesus and His teachings…they hated Him so much that they were willing to work with the Pharisees to kill Him.
  4. The mark of a Sadducee is that he always wants to take away from the Law.
  5. The Sadducees were very involved with politics, and held that the Law had no business mixing with the state.

D. Herodians

* 1. This was another Jewish clique which there is little recorded about, except for sparse details (Matt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6; 12:13)
  2. Clearly, the group’s aim was to strengthen the support for the ruling family of the area (the Herods).
  3. By supporting the Herods, the Jews hoped to enjoy the favor of Rome and its protection.
  4. The Herodians attempted to blend Roman and Jewish cultures in order to accomplish this.
  5. Herodians were more secular than either of the other two groups: they were far more interested in the ends than the means by which they were attained.

E. Other minor sects include the Zealots, Essenes, etc.

**V. The Sanhedrin Council**

A. Often translated “the council,” the Sanhedrin council was the supreme civil and judicial tribunal of the Jews.

B. It was created in approximately 200BC as a way of allowing the Jews some measure of self-sovereignty. By the time of Herod, their political power had largely been taken away, and the council remained mostly to execute Herod’s will, as well as to serve as a religious council.

C. It consisted of 71 members:

1. The High Priest
2. 24 Chief Priests (cf. 1Chron. 24:4, 6)
3. 24 Elders – represented the “common people” (Matt. 21:23)
4. 22 Scribes

D. Jesus may have had this in mind when he selected 70 to teach in the area.

Why study such things? It is important to understand what happens during the gaps of the Bible because things change so drastically during those gaps (cf. Gen.-Exod.). Also, things that ARE talked about in the Bible both before and after these gaps are intimately connected. Daniel 7-9 is historically fulfilled and those fulfillments can be traced in world history, even if they are not specifically detailed in the Scriptures. Knowing these things illuminates our Bible study and also teaches us the relationships between Bible events & world history, a knowledge serving us well as we defend the faith!