



Pray Together

Use the first few minutes of your time together to lead your group in a focused prayer time.

- **Praise:** Spend time praising God for who He is.
- **Repent:** Take a few moments to silently confess any sin that is lingering in your heart.
- **Ask:** Verbalize your needs and the needs of others to God.
- **Yield:** Surrender your will to God.

Read Together

In most printed Bibles, one or two blank pages separate the Old and New Testaments. These innocuous few pages sometimes deceive readers into thinking that the New Testament story picks right up where the Old Testament story ends. And while the overarching focus of God's story has not altered, the backdrop upon which this grand narrative is being played out has changed dramatically!

Four hundred years had passed! And in that time Israel had experienced four major historical periods which shaped who they were as a people:

- **Persian Empire** (539-334 BC) — Israel returned from exile. Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Malachi were written during this time. The Intertestamental Period, or Second Temple Period, begins.
- **Greek Empire** (334-166 BC) — Alexander the Great's influence spreads the Greek language and culture far and wide. A Greek translation of the Old Testament, The Septuagint, was produced for Jews who were speaking a new language.
- **Jewish Independence** (166-63 BC) — When Greek ruler, Antiochus IV, outlawed many Jewish religious practices, a revolt led to a tumultuous period of Jewish independence. Three influential religious groups—Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees—arose during this period.
- **Roman Empire** (63 BC-135 AD) — The Romans captured Jerusalem and dominated the region. Augustus Caesar became Roman Emperor and placed Herod “the Great” as King of the Jews.

Throughout these years, the Jewish people experienced another battle: the battle for their identity as the covenant people of God. Until John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand,” no prophet had spoken in Israel since Malachi. The God who once declared “Thus saith the Lord” and who called His people to “return to Me and I will return to you”...seemed to remain silent.

But God's silence was no indicator of inactivity. God was preparing to break the silence, in fact, He always had been. Anticipation was rising as His covenant people awaited the coming of the fullness of time.

Discuss Together

Use these questions to engage in an informative and impactful discussion.

- As you consider the 400 years of prophetic silence, identify the most significant questions you need to ask and answer to better grasp the importance of this period. Why should a disciple wrestle with this period of silence?



- Malachi 4 may have been the final words of Old Testament writing before Christ's birth some four hundred years later. How do these words prepare us for Jesus?
- Isaiah reminds us of a divine truth, which at times can be comforting and other times maddening. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:8) Job, Elijah, the Psalmist, Paul, and others throughout Scripture have wrestled with this truth. Share a time when God was working and active even when you perceived His silence and idleness. How did it feel? What did you learn? How did God prove Himself?
- How can you minister to a brother or sister in Christ who is experiencing a period of perceived silence from God? What theological truths might they be wrestling with? Now consider how this longing or desire for divine connection could manifest itself in the life of someone who is far from Christ. Discuss how you might proclaim the power of the Gospel in that setting.
- How should disciples respond when God provides clarity and illumination after a period of silence?
- How has your identify as a disciple of Christ been impacted by a changing culture? Share specific ways you have struggled to be faithful to Christ in the midst of change. Share specific ways Christ has helped you overcome uncertainty and embrace your identify as a disciple of Christ.
- God has broken His silence. How should the Body of Christ “go there” with this message? How do you personally need to “go there” with this message?

Who that saw [Jesus'] authority over evil spirits and their response to it could doubt that He was, indeed, the Son, the Wisdom and the Power of God? Even the very creation broke silence at His behest and, marvelous to relate, confessed with one voice before the cross, that monument of victory, that He who suffered thereon in the body was not man only, but Son of God and Savior of all. The sun veiled his face, the earth quaked, the mountains were rent asunder, all men were stricken with awe. These things showed that Christ on the cross was God, and that all creation was His slave and was bearing witness by its fear to the presence of its Master.
 —Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*

Pray Together

Pray through Galatians 4:4-7.



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