

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE INTER-TESTAMENT PERIOD

September 5, 2018

The Old Testament ends with Malachi (approximately 397 BC).

There is a period of over four hundred years before Christ is born (known as the silent years).

As we leave the Old Testament the Jews are living under the authority of the Persian Empire.

They have been living in exile in Babylon since about 605 BC.

Beginning in 538 BC small groups of Jews started returning to their homeland.

Daniel and Ezekiel ministered to the exiles.

Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi ministered to those returning to their land.

During that 400 year time span:

The people became numerous in number.

They shifted from being under Persian rule to eventually being under Roman rule.

There appears to be a pause in communication between God and his people.

His silence must have been deafening to the Jewish people.

Some demanded that God act as God had acted in the past.

Others believed that humanity was too sinful to hear from God.

It was said the lack of faith was the cause of the silence and apparent inactivity of God.

In the Old Testament, God had spoken on numerous occasions and through various people.

In hindsight, God was preparing to speak his greatest and most powerful Word to humankind.

In the 400 year period there were six historical eras:

1. The Persian Era (397-336 BC) (really began in 536 BC with the Babylonian exile)
We need to remember that after the reign of Solomon there were two kingdoms.
The northern kingdom of Israel was scattered all over the Assyrian empire.
Later Babylonia conquered the southern kingdom of Judah.
Persia eventually conquered Babylonia.
Their foreign policy permitted the people of Judah to return to their homeland.
Persia was a strong influence over the Jewish people for some 200 years (536-336 BC).
Judea (succeeded Judah) continued to be a Persian territory under the governor of Syria.
The Jewish people were allowed to observe their religious beliefs without interference.
2. The Greek Era (336-323 BC)
Between 334 and 331 BC Alexander the Great defeated the Persian King, Darius III.
He conquered Persia, Babylon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and western India.
Under his influence the entire western world began to speak and study Greek.
Hellenization – included the adoption of Greek culture and religion in all parts of the world.
The Greek way of life was attractive, sophisticated and very appealing.
But they also worshiped other gods.
Ultimately this influence was dangerous to the religion of Israel.

3. The Egyptian Era (323-198 BC)

When Alexander the Great died in 323 BC the Greek empire was divided into four parts. Ptolemy Soter received Egypt and soon dominated Israel. It was during this time that the Septuagint was authorized. It was the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. There was a gradual infiltration of Greek influence and assimilation of their way of life. During this time the Orthodox Jews emerged as a distinct group. They were the predecessors of the Pharisees (which means *separatists*). The Jews prospered until the end of the era when conflicts arose between Egypt and Syria. When the Syrians defeated Egypt in 198 BC, Judea was taken over by Syria.
4. The Syrian Era (198-165 BC)

The Jews were treated harshly but still allowed to maintain local rule under their High Priest. A political uprising occurred when the Orthodox Jews replaced the High Priest. It angered the political leader who then set out to destroy every element of the Jewish faith. He forbade all sacrifices and out-lawed the rite of circumcision. He canceled Sabbath worship and did not allow the celebration of feast days. He mutilated and destroyed nearly every copy of the Hebrew Bible. Jews were forced to eat pork and make sacrifices to idols. He desecrated the Most Holy Place by building an altar and offering a sacrifice to Zeus. Many Jews died at the hand of persecutions.
5. The Maccabean Era (165-63 BC)

An elderly priest named Mattathias lived in a village northwest of Jerusalem. A Syrian official tried to enforce heathen sacrifices in that village. Mattathias killed the Syrian official and the Jew who offered the sacrifice. He fled to the mountains and thousands of faithful Jews joined him. The Maccabean Revolt ended when Jerusalem was retaken. The temple was cleansed and biblical worship was restored. The celebration is known as the *Feast of Dedication* or *Hanukkah*. The Jewish people experienced almost seventy years of independence. There arose a difference of opinion concerning the position of High Priest and kingship. Orthodox Jews resented those who served who were not descendants of Aaron. They recognized no king unless he was of the lineage of King David. Those who opposed the Pharisees were called Sadducees (which means *righteous*).
6. The Roman Era (63-4 BC)

The independence of the Jews ended in 63 BC when Pompey conquered Syria. The Roman general also entered Israel and took the city of Jerusalem by force. Antipater was appointed procurator by Julius Caesar in 47 BC. His son, Herod, eventually became the king of the Jews around 40 BC. Herod the Great planned and carried out the building of the new temple in Jerusalem. However, he was quick to kill the ruling families in Judea. He was on the throne when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. At this time the Pharisees were strongly connected with the Scribes (local teachers). They believed in strict adherence to the Scriptures (written law) and the Misnah (oral law).

The Sadducees were strongly connected to the High Priest.
The priests tended toward the more social and political aspects of their position.
The Sanhedrin was the ruling counsel of the Jews and brought civil law to the people.

Under Roman rule the leadership enforced the law (sometimes brutally).
Rome brought peace and enforced that peace.
It brought a stable government and a systematic way of governing.
Rome was also built on slavery and slaves were the product of defeats in wars.
Roman laws protected slaves and their families and allowed them rights.
Rome also built roads to connect their empire (and helped the church to spread the Gospel).

The Herodians was a political party who sought to further Herod's government.
The Zealots was a political party who opposed the Herodians.
The Essenes withdrew from society and practiced a monastic life.

The destruction of the temple by Babylon occurred in 586 BC.
The synagogue became the place of education and worship for the Jews in exile.
The majority of the Jews did not return to Palestine after the exile.
Synagogues continued to function in the Diaspora (dispersion) and in Palestine.
In the midst of this dark part of their history, God broke his silence with the advent of his Son.

Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians call this 400 year period the Deuterocanonical Period.
Protestants call it the *400 Silent Years* because God did not reveal anything new to his people.
Many of the *deuterocanonical books* were written during this time.
They are accepted as Scripture by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodoxy.
Although some might conclude that God was silent, God was not inactive.
For 400 years there was no prophet and then all of a sudden one appears.
The Jewish people were now in bondage to Rome and their hope was for the Messiah to come.
They believed that God would send them a king to deliver them from their oppression.
So the Jewish people flocked to see John the Baptist.

The Literature of the Inter-Testament Period

The most significant material written during this time period was the *Apocrypha*.

In Greek the word means *the hidden things*.

It consists of a group of seventeen books:

1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel
(Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), Prayer of Manasseh and 1-4 Maccabees

These books are not found in the Hebrew Bible.

The Septuagint included them as an addendum to the canonical Old Testament.

The Vulgate (Latin version of the Bible) also included the Apocrypha.

Most theologians believe they have great value from a cultural and historical viewpoint.

Some of the Apocrypha (Judith and Tobit) may have been written in the Persian period.

Most of them were written in the Hellenistic period.

The Apocrypha

1 Esdras	An attempt to revise the canonical book of Ezra.
2 Esdras	Dialogues between Ezra and angels to discuss the problem of evil.
Tobit	A romantic tale about a Jewish family taken in captivity to Nineveh.
Judith	A story about a widow named Judith who saved her city from a military siege.
Esther +	Additions made to stress the religious meaning of the original story. It made it clear that it was for the sake of their piety that the Jews were delivered.
Solomon	A collection of theological and devotional essays.
Ecclesiasticus	Written by a wisdom teacher named Joshua Ben Sirach. It consists of proverbs and other wise sayings about common life. It also contains longer discourses about religious life and faith.
Baruch	Baruch was the secretary to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. The first part contains a confession of sins by the Jewish people. Another part includes a praise of wisdom. It ends with a lament over the desolation of Jerusalem.
Jeremiah	It is supposed to be a letter from Jeremiah to the Jews in exile. It is a short narrative against pagan idolatry.
Azariah	An embellishment of the ordeal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It includes the prayers of the three young men put in the fiery furnace.
Susanna	A story about a woman falsely accused of adultery and saved by Daniel.
Bel / Dragon	Two stories that attack the worship of idols.
Manasseh	A psalm of repentance.
1 Maccabees	The book imitates the biblical style of the historical books of the Old Testament. It contains diplomatic and other official documents. It is highly regarded by historians as a source of accurate information.
2 Maccabees	A different account of the same events found in 1 Maccabees. The interest of the writer is religious rather than historical. He uses the history as a backdrop for advancing current religious ideas.
3 Maccabees	The book has nothing to do with the Maccabees or their revolt. A story of persecution of the Jews under Ptolemy before the uprising.
4 Maccabees	A homily praising the supremacy of pious reason over passion.

Outline of *Between the Testaments* – Page 135

Assignment for September 12

Complete the Exercises on Pages 129-134

Read the *Gospel of Matthew* or the portions outlined on Page 134