

The Inter-Testament Period

“Over 400 years separate the final events and prophecies recorded in the Old Testament (*Nehemiah* and *Malachi*) and those that open the New Testament (from approximately 432 to 6 BC). Because there was no prophetic word from God during that time (*Amos 8:11, 12*), that part of Jewish history is missing from our Bibles. Thus, we have to look to other historical documents, such as the works of Josephus or the *Apocrypha*, to gather what took place during that time. However, the history of these years followed the pattern prescribed by Daniel (*2:24, 25; 7:1-28; 8:1-27; 11:1-35*). It is clear to see that even though God’s voice was silent, His hand was still at work, as He was actively using those events to set the stage for the coming of Christ” [John MacArthur].

Here are a few of the highlights from this 400-year period:

Persian Power

As the Old Testament closes (about 432 BC), the Persians are in power, with Artaxerxes on the throne; they remained the dominant world force for another 100 years (330). See the chart of Persian rulers for more details.

Alexander the Great

In 333 BC, the Greek world was stirred to action by the young Alexander, who set out to conquer the waning Persian Empire. He successfully completed his mission three years later, when he took its capital, Susa, from Darius III (330).

Not only was Alexander successful conquering the Persians, but he was successful conquering the Near and Middle East, which included the Jews.

The Four Generals

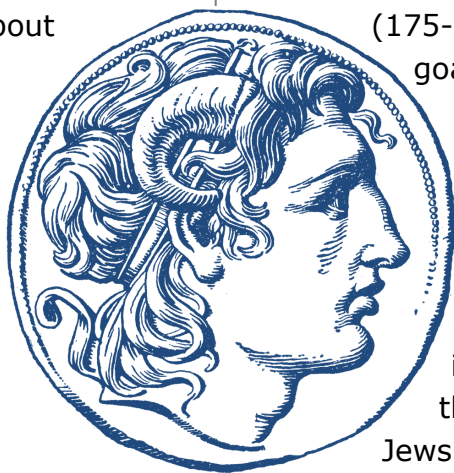
Alexander died in 323, shortly after conquering the Persians, which left his vast empire divided among his four generals. The Jews were given to General Ptolemy who ruled Egypt. They experienced peace under Ptolemaic control; it was during that time that the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) were translated into Greek, called the *Septuagint* (250 BC). However, it was soon after that the Syrians or Seleucid Empire (General Seleucus) began warring with Egypt over control of the Jews; the Syrians won (198).

Antiochus Epiphanes

When the Jews were governed by the Syrians, or Seleucids, there began to be tension in the land, especially under the oppressive rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), who made it his

goal to harass the Jews. It was Antiochus who desecrated the Temple with Greek gods and the sacrifice of a pig. While it was believed that the Jewish culture would disappear, as it was tainted severely by their Greek oppressors, the

Jews raised up a radical group of righteous zealots called the Hasidim, or “righteous ones,” whose sole purpose was to preserve the Jewish heritage and culture; this group would eventually be called the Pharisees.



The Maccabean Revolt

The Jewish people could only stand so much of Epiphanes' cruelty before they rose in revolution. Behind the leadership of the Maccabee family (a Jerusalem priest and his sons), the Jews established a militia which stood valiantly against the Syrian army. Over the years, the Maccabees regained control of Jerusalem, cleansed the desecrated Temple, enlisted the alliance of Rome, and ultimately gained Jewish independence (142-63 BC). It was the eight-day cleansing of the Temple that became known as the Feast of Hanukkah.

The Invasion of Rome

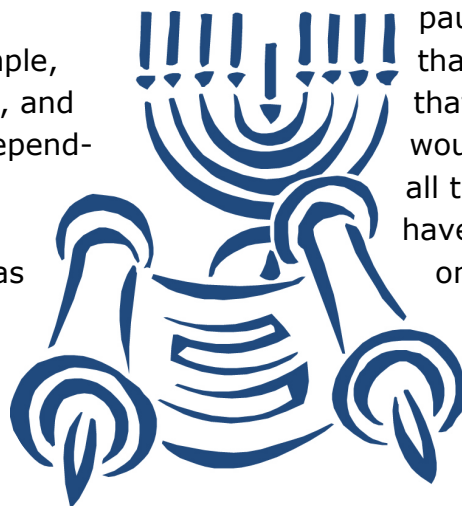
After nearly a hundred years of independence, the Jews dissolved into civil war, in which the Romans had to officiate. As civil wars tend to weaken nations, Pompey, the famous Roman general, saw this as his time to absorb the Jews into the Roman Empire. Thus, Pompey conquered the Jews (63 BC) and added them to the new dominant power in the world. After years of unrest in Judea (or the province of Palestine), the Romans appointed Herod to rule over the Jews in their interest; he ruled God's people with force and cruelty (37-4 BC). Of course, King Herod and the Romans were the political powers present as the New Testament began.

The Why Question

In closing, the questions that beg to be asked are these — why is none of this recorded in the Bible, and why did God choose to be silent during this time? No one knows for sure, but we do know that this was all a part of His plan; however, it would be nice to know the reasons behind

His silence.

Perhaps God had said all that He needed to say to His people; He was now waiting for the right time to come and dwell among them. He would speak to them next in person through His Son Jesus. But why the long drought of revelation before Jesus' entrance? Maybe God wanted an obvious



pause before He sent His Son; that way, we would see clearly that He was the Messiah. If Jesus would have come in the midst of all the prophets, then He would have certainly been mistaken as only another prophet. This way, with a 400-year gap between the last prophet and the entrance of John the Baptist (the next prophet), perhaps the Messiah would not be overlooked.

However one views the mysterious Inter-testament Period, it is certain that we have exactly what God wanted us to have in the Scriptures. In fact, in my mind, God simply cut out the middle of the story so that we could see more clearly how the Old and New Testaments link together and that Christ was (and still is) the prophesied Messiah.