

38. Jesus in the New Testament

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Before we jump into the New Testament, it would be nice to know what was happening during the "Silent 400 Years". If truth be known, that title is a misnomer. Yes, it is true that no prophet spoke; no revelation was given; no oracle of God was proclaimed by any of the Godly men or women, but it was hardly silent in terms of preparation by our Mighty God.

Please allow me to say it in another way. God's voice may not be heard, but His hands were busy building the stage upon which He would deliver His grandest, most eloquent, and most moving speech – the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

What did His hands do? We can see His handy work all over.

A. THE RISE AND FALL OF KINGDOMS

1) The fall of the Persian Empire

When Malachi wrote his Book, the land of the Jews belonged to the Persian Empire. It remained so until about a century later, when the conquering military machine of Alexander the Great rolled eastward from Asia Minor and destroyed the Persian Empire, eventually reaching Palestine and as far as Egypt as well as northwest of India.

2) The rise of Greece

The dream of Alexander the Great was building a new world under his control that they all used Greek language and culture. This was known as "Hellenization." The language he enforced was common Greek, a.k.a., "Koine" Greek. It was the language of the New Testament. Alexander thought that there was no one above him, but he was a mere tool of God to prepare the world for the spread of the Gospel.

By 332 B.C. the region of Palestine had been absorbed into the control of the ever expanding Greek kingdom. However, Alexander the Great extended his benevolence to the Jews, even allowing them a measure of self-rule due the prophecy regarding him in the Book of Daniel chapter 2.

3) The fall of Alexander's Greece and the divided kingdoms

Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C. at the age of 33. For about the next 150 years, 4 of his successors and their successors played tug-of-war for control of the empire – with Israel stuck in the middle.

One of these successors, Antiochus IV Epiphanes whose name means, "God made manifest," ruled from 175-164 B.C. This arrogant tyrant attempted to consolidate his fading empire through a policy of radical Hellenization that included the eradication of the Jewish religion. He prohibited some of the central elements of Jewish practice, attempted to destroy all copies of the Pentateuch and required offerings to their Greek god Zeus. The pinnacle of his outrage was the erection of a statue of Zeus and the sacrificing of a pig in the Jerusalem temple itself.

Antiochus's blasphemous policies triggered the Maccabean revolt (166-142 B.C.), led by Mattathias, a Jew of priestly lineage, and his five sons. The revolt gained independence for Judah until 63 B.C., when Rome, under General Pompey, dug its iron talons into Palestine. Pompey took Jerusalem after a three-month siege of the

temple area, massacring priests in the performance of their duties and entering the Most Holy Place. This vicious conquest began Roman rule in a way that Jews could neither forgive, nor forget.

4) The rise of Rome

Later, in 48 B.C., General Pompey lost a power struggle to his former ally, Julius Caesar. Caesar held the reigns of power until 44 B.C., when he was assassinated. Subsequent wars and infighting brought Julius Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, to the throne.

In 27 B.C. the Roman Senate gives Octavian the title of Augustus, and it is this Augustus Caesar who gets credit for founding the Roman Empire with its "Pax Romana," or Roman Peace. For the next two centuries the civilized world will enjoy unprecedented peace, prosperity, and, for the most part, good civil government under Roman rule. It causes one to think again of a God who is working through history to achieve His eternal purposes.

5) The international stage was set

Alexander's kingdom brought cultural and linguistic cohesiveness to a formerly fragmented world. The kingdom of Caesar Augustus ushered in civil organization and peace. But it also brought conflict, for Augustus established the idea that Caesar was a god.

The international stage was set, then, for the coming of a greater kingdom – the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ. He would bring to humanity what no earthly ruler could give – forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the revelation of the One true God.

B. LITERATURE FROM THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

Though no new prophecy was recorded during the intertestamental period, this was still a time of prolific writing. Two of the more significant works are the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1) The Septuagint

Around 250 B.C., the Septuagint (sometimes designated as LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, made the Scriptures available to Jews who no longer spoke their ancestral language, as well as to the entire Greek-speaking world. This translation later became the Bible of the early church.

The Septuagint is extremely valuable to Christianity and proving the accuracy and authenticity of the Bible. Even though the Book of Daniel was written around 536 B.C., the authorship and dating of the Book of Daniel has been challenged by many liberal Bible critics. They doubt its date because the Book contains many detailed and accurate prophecies that they can't believe that it could have possibly been written that long ago, hundreds of years before some of its most precise prophecies.

Some liberals have suggested that it was written at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The problem with that idea is that the Septuagint before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes contains the Book of Daniel in Greek. Busted!!!

2) The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls may be the most significant discovery of manuscripts in modern times. Found in the spring of 1947 by an Arab shepherd who stumbled upon these

documents and fragments of documents included OT books while searching for a lost goat in Qumran Caves.

One of the most remarkable finds was a complete 24 foot long scroll of Isaiah. The Scrolls provide copies 1,000 years closer to the originals than were previously known. Though God spoke no new Scripture during this period, He still sovereignly preserved and confirmed His Word that He had already spoken.

C. JEWISH SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LIFE

There are two important things that were mentioned in the NT, but not mentioned anywhere in the OT – the Synagogues and the Religious and Political Sects.

1) Synagogues

The synagogues, many scholars say, evolved during the Babylonian Captivity when the Jews were cut off from the temple, divested of nationhood and surrounded by pagan religious practices. They concentrated on the law rather than nationhood, on personal piety rather than rituals of meaningless sacrifices.

The emphases on personal piety and a relationship with God, which characterized synagogue worship, not only helped preserve Judaism, but also prepared the way for the Christian Gospel.

The synagogues were well established by Jesus' day, having become the regular Jewish assembly for prayer and worship. It's no surprise, then, that Jesus went to the synagogues as well as to the temple to teach and heal. And the synagogues became the focal point of everybody's livelihood. Anyone who was excommunicated from it, became an isolated person in the community. So, it was more than a simple place of religion.

2) Religious and Political Sects

During the time between the end of the OT and the opening of the NT many things took place in Israel. After they had returned to the land, there was a development of new groups and parties that were not mentioned in the Old Testament. There were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, and the Herodians.

- **Scribes**

The scribes had a good beginning. Evidently Ezra was a scribe and the founder of that group. They were the professional expounders of the Law. However, by the time of our Lord Jesus, they had become "hairsplitters" and were more concerned with the letter of the Law than with the spirit of the Law.

- **Pharisees**

The Pharisees also had a good beginning. They defended the Jewish way of life against all foreign influences. They were strict legalists, they believed in the OT, and they were nationalists in politics. They wanted to bring in the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth with their ways.

- **Sadducees**

The Sadducees were made up of the wealthy and socially-minded liberals. They had no spiritual depth. They wanted to get rid of tradition. They rejected the supernatural and were opposed to the Pharisees who accepted the supernatural and accepted the OT. They were closely connected to the Greek Epicureans.

- **Herodians**

The Herodians were a party in the days of Jesus who arose as political opportunists. They were strictly a group to try to keep the Herods on the throne, so that they also could have power.

D. THE PREPARATION OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THE MESSIAH

Into this clashing fray of ideologies stepped Jesus of Nazareth. He dared to challenge the hypocrisy and legalism of the Pharisees and to condemn the snobbery, corruption, and worldliness of the Sadducees. It was a dangerous course to take, and in the end, it cost Him His life, but saved ours.

When we were young in the Lord, we all had a question, “Why didn’t God just give us one combined portrait of Jesus, His Son, instead of four interdependent views?” Because the different Gospels were originally written for different audiences with different needs.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are commonly referred to as the “Synoptic” Gospels – from the Greek ‘Synoptikos, meaning “seeing together”, because they are similar to one another in their viewpoint, content, narrative flow, and style. But John’s Gospel is altogether different. His is the most theological of the 4 Gospels, beginning with Jesus’ preexistence in heaven rather than His birth in a manger. In this way and many others, John emphasizes Jesus’ deity. John also contains the greatest amount of unique material, while the other Gospels have more materials in common.

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Portrayal of Jesus	Messianic King	Suffering Servant	Son of Man	Son of God
Primary Recipients	Jews	Roman Church	Theophilus and all Gentiles	All People
Primary Purpose	Show Jesus as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah	Strengthen suffering believers by focusing on suffering, yet triumphant Savior	Provide a warm, human portrait of the Savior of the whole world	Encourage belief in the eternal Son of God
Probable Written Order	2	1	3	4
Unique Material	42%	7%	59%	92%

These 4 Gospels come first in the NT Scripture, not because they were the first Books. Actually the first Book was written by Jesus’ half brother James. But it is because Christ is our foundation and shows the reason for our salvation.

So, if I may, I can divide the NT into 3 groups:

- Justification: From Matthew to John
- Sanctification: From Acts to Jude
- Glorification: Revelation