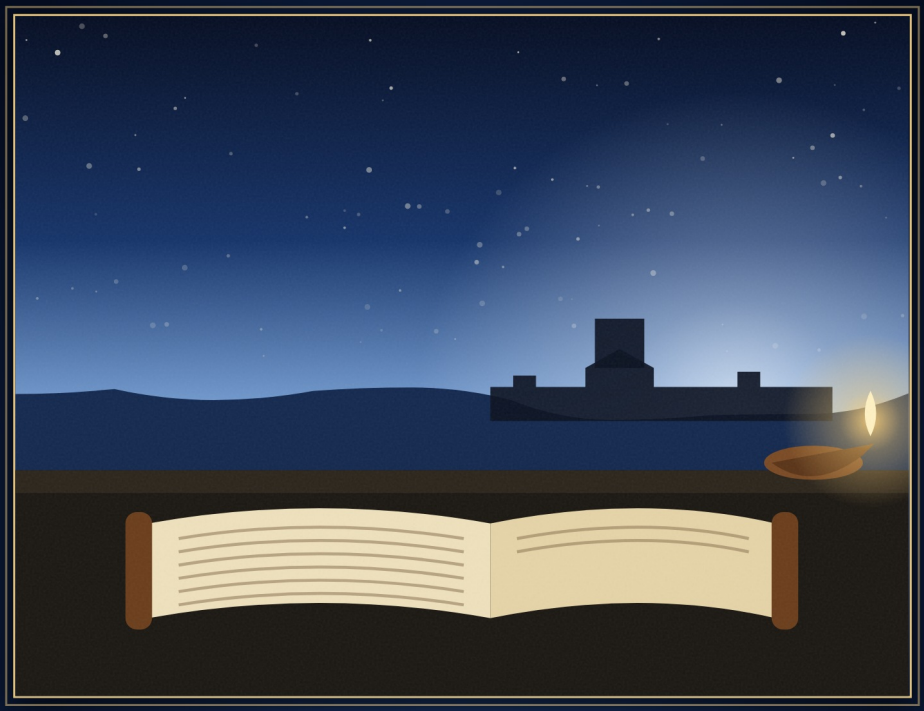
A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

The 400 Silent Years

Short Studies for the Christian Life



What happened between Malachi and Matthew

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

The 400 Silent Years

What Happened Between Malachi and Matthew

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The 400 Silent Years: What Happened Between Malachi and Matthew

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Contents

Before You Begin....1
Chapter 1: Where Malachi Left Off....3
Chapter 2: Alexander and the Greek World....6
Chapter 3: The King Who Defiled the Temple....9
Chapter 4: The Maccabees and the Feast of Dedication....12
Chapter 5: Priest Kings and the Coming of Rome....15
Chapter 6: Herod the Great....17
Chapter 7: The People and Places of the Gospels....19
Chapter 8: The Fullness of Time....22
A Closing Word....25
Timeline of the Silent Years....26
Scripture Index....27
About This Book....28

Before You Begin

> *Look, days **are** coming," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the LORD.*
>
> Amos 8:11 (SLB)

Turn the last page of Malachi and the first page of Matthew, and it looks like the story just keeps going. It doesn't. Between those two pages sit about four hundred years. When Malachi wrote, the Persian Empire ruled the world and Jerusalem was a small, struggling town with a modest rebuilt temple. When Matthew opens, Rome rules the world, a king named Herod sits on the throne in Jerusalem, the temple is being rebuilt on a grand scale, and the Gospels are full of people and places the Old Testament never mentions. Pharisees. Sadducees. Synagogues. Samaritans. Roman soldiers. Tax collectors.

Turning the page from Malachi to Matthew can feel like jumping a canyon. Suddenly there are Pharisees, synagogues and Roman rulers the Old Testament never mentions. I wrote this book for everyday Bible readers who want to understand those four hundred years without wading through dry textbooks. Seeing how God worked between the Testaments makes the Gospels come alive.

Where did all of that come from? That is what this little book is about.

Why People Call Them the Silent Years

After Malachi, God did not send another prophet to Israel until John the Baptist. No new books of Scripture were written. That is why these years are often called the silent years. Jewish writers of the time noticed it too. The book of 1 Maccabees, written about a hundred years before Christ, speaks of a time of great distress in Israel unlike any since the prophets stopped appearing among them. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing near the end of the first century, said the books written after the time of the Persian king Artaxerxes were not trusted like the earlier ones, because there had not been an exact succession of prophets since then.

But silent does not mean absent. God did not speak new Scripture in those years, but He was not idle. He was keeping every promise He had made, and He was moving empires around like pieces on a board. When the silence finally broke, the world was ready for His Son.

How Many Years?

Malachi wrote around 430 B.C., in the days of Nehemiah. John the Baptist began to preach around A.D. 28. That is a little over 450 years, so “four hundred” is a round number. It has been used for a long time, and I use it here too.

A Few Notes

Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. I capitalize pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Most of what we know about these years comes from 1 and 2 Maccabees, from Josephus, and from Greek and Roman historians. 1 and 2 Maccabees are part of the Apocrypha. They are useful history, and I use them that way, but they are not Scripture. I tell you what they say in my own words, and I do not quote them as Bible text. Dates before the time of Christ are close but not exact, and where historians disagree I say so.

Each chapter is short and ends with a few study questions, so you can read this alone or with a group.

Chapter 1: Where Malachi Left Off

> *Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me; and suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight; look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies.*
>
> Malachi 3:1 (SLB)

The Old Testament closes under Persian rule. In 539 B.C. Cyrus the Great of Persia took Babylon, and the next year he let the Jewish exiles go home. Ezra tells that story. The people who returned rebuilt the temple, finished in 516 B.C. Later Ezra came to teach the law, and Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Malachi preached in that same period, around 430 B.C.

It was not a proud time. The rebuilt temple was much smaller than Solomon's. The people were poor. Their hearts had grown cold. Malachi rebuked priests who offered blind and sick animals, men who divorced the wives of their youth, and people who robbed God by holding back their tithes. Even so, there was a faithful group in the land.

> *Then those who fear the LORD spoke together, each man with his neighbor; and the LORD paid attention and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and for those who esteem His name.* (Malachi 3:16)

And Malachi ended with a promise. God would send a messenger to clear the way, and then the Lord Himself would come to His temple. Before the great day of the LORD, He would send Elijah the prophet.

> *Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And he will turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land* ***with*** *a devoted destruction.* (Malachi 4:5-6)

Then the Old Testament goes quiet. The next voice we hear is a man in the wilderness wearing camel's hair, preaching repentance. Jesus said plainly who that man was.

> *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive **it**, he himself is Elijah, who is about to come.* (Matthew 11:13-14)

So the silent years are bracketed by a promise and its fulfillment. Malachi said a messenger was coming. Four centuries later, he came.

In project work, the hardest part of a schedule can be a long stretch where nothing seems to move on the surface. Looking back, I can see God lining up pieces I could not see at the time. The four hundred years after Malachi remind us that God's silence is never God's absence.

Life Under Persia

For about the first hundred years after Malachi, the Jews lived quietly under Persian rule. Persia let its peoples keep their own customs and religion as long as they paid their taxes and stayed loyal. Judea was a small province. The high priest in Jerusalem became the main leader of the people, and he would stay that way for a long time.

Two things grew during these years that you will meet all through the Gospels. The first was the Jewish community outside the land. Many Jews never went back from Babylon, and others settled in Egypt and across the Persian world. We call this scattering the Diaspora. The second was the habit of gathering to read and explain the law. Ezra had read the law to the people while the Levites explained it (Nehemiah 8:8). Teachers of the law, the scribes, became more and more important. Over time, the meeting place for prayer and reading would grow into the synagogue.

Meanwhile, the relationship with the Samaritans went from bad to worse. The Samaritans lived in the old northern territory, worshiped the God of Israel in their own way, and had opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day. In time they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. That is the mountain the Samaritan woman pointed to when she talked with Jesus.

> *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship.* (John 4:20)

Study Questions

1. Read Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6. What did God promise would happen before the Lord came?
2. Why do you think God allowed so long a silence before sending John the Baptist?
3. Malachi 3:16 describes faithful people in a cold time. What can you learn from them?

Chapter 2: Alexander and the Greek World

> *And the shaggy male goat **is** the king of Greece; and the great horn which **is** between its eyes, it **is** the first king.*
>
> Daniel 8:21 (SLB)

In 336 B.C. a young man named Alexander became king of Macedonia, north of Greece. He was twenty years old. Within a few years he had crossed into Asia, beaten the Persian army at the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C. and again at Gaugamela in 331 B.C., and brought the whole Persian Empire under his rule. He marched as far as India. Then, in 323 B.C., he died in Babylon at about thirty-two.

Daniel had seen this coming more than two hundred years before. In his vision, a ram with two horns was running wild until a male goat came from the west so fast it did not touch the ground, and broke the ram's two horns. Then the goat's great horn was broken, and four horns came up in its place. The angel Gabriel explained it.

> *The ram which you saw, the owner of the two horns, **is** the kings of Media and Persia. And the shaggy male goat **is** the king of Greece; and the great horn which **is** between its eyes, it **is** the first king. And the broken **horn**, and four arose in its place: four kingdoms will arise from **the** nation, and not with its power.* (Daniel 8:20-22)

That is exactly what happened. Alexander's empire did not pass to a son. It was carved up among his generals. After years of fighting, four main kingdoms came out of it. Two of them matter most for Israel: the Ptolemies, who ruled from Egypt, and the Seleucids, who ruled from Syria. Judea sat right between them, like a small country caught between two big neighbors.

A Story from Josephus

Josephus tells a story that Alexander came to Jerusalem, that the high priest met him in his robes, and that Alexander bowed to him and was

shown the book of Daniel, where it said a Greek would destroy the Persians. Alexander was pleased, according to the story, and treated the Jews kindly. Many historians doubt this happened, since no Greek writer mentions it. I pass it along as Josephus' account, not as proven history. What is certain is that the Jews came under Greek rule without being destroyed.

The Greek Way of Life

Alexander's conquests did more than move borders. They spread Greek language, Greek cities, Greek schools, Greek theaters and Greek gyms across the whole region. This spread of Greek culture is called Hellenism. Many people, including many Jews, wanted to live like the Greeks. Others saw it as a danger to faith in the one true God. That tension would boil over in the next century.

But God used even this. Greek became the common language of the eastern Mediterranean world. It was not the classical Greek of the philosophers but an everyday Greek called Koine, the common tongue. When the apostles later wrote the New Testament, they wrote it in that common Greek, and people from Rome to Syria could read it.

The Bible in Greek

Under the Ptolemies, the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, grew large, and many of them spoke Greek better than Hebrew. So the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. The first part, the five books of Moses, was done in the 200s B.C., and the rest followed over the next century or so. This translation is called the Septuagint, from the Latin word for seventy, because of a later story that seventy-two scholars did the work. It was the Bible of many Jews outside the land, and the New Testament writers often quote from it.

Think about what that means. Before Jesus was born, the promises of the Messiah were already written in the language the whole world could read. When the apostles went out preaching, the Scriptures were already there waiting for them.

Study Questions

1. Read Daniel 8:20-22. How does history line up with what Gabriel told Daniel?
2. How did God use the spread of the Greek language for the gospel?
3. Why would Greek culture have been both a blessing and a danger for God's people?

Chapter 3: The King Who Defiled the Temple

> *And arms from him will arise, and they will profane the sanctuary, the stronghold, and they will remove the continual **offering**, and they will set up the abomination that makes desolate.*
>
> Daniel 11:31 (SLB)

For about a hundred years the Ptolemies of Egypt ruled Judea, and for the most part they left the Jews alone. Then in 200 B.C. the Seleucid king Antiochus III defeated the Egyptian army at Panium, near the springs of the Jordan, and by 198 B.C. Judea had passed to the Seleucids of Syria.

In 175 B.C. his son came to the throne as Antiochus IV. He called himself Epiphanes, which means "God made visible." Some of his own people made a joke of it and called him Epimanes, "the madman." He was determined to unite his kingdom under Greek ways, and a party of Jews in Jerusalem was eager to help him. The high priesthood itself was bought and sold. A Greek gym was built in Jerusalem, and some young Jewish men tried to hide the marks of their circumcision so they would fit in with the Greeks.

The Abomination

Then it got much worse. According to 1 Maccabees, in 167 B.C. Antiochus sent orders that the Jews must give up the law of their God. The daily sacrifices were stopped. Sabbath keeping and circumcision were forbidden, and mothers who circumcised their babies were put to death. Copies of the law were torn up and burned. An altar to the Greek god Zeus was set up on top of the altar of the LORD in the temple, and unclean animals, including pigs, were offered there. 2 Maccabees adds that the temple itself was renamed for Olympian Zeus.

Daniel had described all of this in advance.

> *And in the latter part of their reign, when the transgressors have completed **it**, a king will arise, strong of face and understanding riddles. And his power will be mighty, and not by his own power; and*

> *he will destroy wondrously, and he will prosper and act, and he will destroy mighty ones and **the** people of **the** holy ones. And through his insight he will make deceit prosper by his hand, and in his heart he will magnify himself, and in ease he will destroy many; and he will stand against the Prince of princes, and without hand he will be broken.* (Daniel 8:23-25)

And again, in even more detail, in Daniel 11, where a king of the north turns against the holy covenant, profanes the sanctuary, removes the daily offering, and sets up "the abomination that makes desolate." Then Daniel adds something important about the faithful in that time.

> *And those who act wickedly **against** the covenant he will pollute with flatteries; and the people who know their God will show strength and act. And those of the people who have insight will give understanding to the many; and they will stumble by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder, **for** days.* (Daniel 11:32-33)

That is a fair summary of what came next.

A Preview of the Future

Antiochus IV was a real fulfillment of Daniel's words. But he was not the last word. Two hundred years later, long after Antiochus was dead, Jesus spoke of "the abomination of desolation" as something still to come.

> *Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in **the** holy place (let the **one** reading understand)* (Matthew 24:15)

Paul did the same when he described the man of sin who will take his seat in the temple of God and present himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). I believe the Bible teaches that this will happen in the seven years of tribulation, after the church has been caught up to meet the Lord. Antiochus was a preview. He shows us in history what the final Antichrist will be like: proud, cruel, set against God's people, and in the end broken without a human hand. If you want to study that in full, my Revelation Bible Study: A Verse by Verse Study and my Daniel Bible Study walk through it chapter by chapter.

Study Questions

1. What did Antiochus IV try to take away from the Jewish people?
2. Read Daniel 11:32-33. What did the people who knew their God do?
3. Why does it matter that Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation as still in the future?

Chapter 4: The Maccabees and the Feast of Dedication

> *Now the **Feast of** Dedication took place in Jerusalem, and it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the porch of Solomon.*
>
> John 10:22-23 (SLB)

In the small town of Modein, northwest of Jerusalem, lived an old priest named Mattathias and his five sons. When the king's officer came and ordered the town to offer a pagan sacrifice, Mattathias refused. When another Jew stepped up to offer it, Mattathias killed him at the altar, then killed the king's officer and tore the altar down. He called out for everyone who was zealous for the law to follow him, and he and his sons fled to the hills.

That was the start of the revolt. Mattathias died soon after, and his son Judas took command. Judas was nicknamed Maccabeus, which most likely means "the hammer." His small, poorly armed bands of fighters beat one Seleucid army after another. From his nickname, the whole family and their story came to be called the Maccabees.

At 16 I walked away from the Air Force because they would not honor the computer job I had qualified for. Standing on principle usually costs something up front. The Maccabees stood firm when bowing down would have kept the peace, and God honors that kind of resolve.

Cleansing the Temple

In 164 B.C. Judas and his men took back Jerusalem. They found the temple desolate, the gates burned, and weeds growing in the courts. They tore down the defiled altar, built a new one of uncut stones as the law required, made new holy vessels, and on the twenty-fifth day of the month Kislev, three years after the temple was defiled, they offered sacrifice again. The celebration lasted eight days, and they decided it should be kept every year.

That feast is the Feast of Dedication, known today as Hanukkah. You may have heard the story of a small jar of oil that lasted eight days. That story is not in 1 or 2 Maccabees. It first appears in the Talmud, written down centuries later. The Maccabee books simply say the people celebrated for eight days with joy.

Jesus at the Feast

Here is a detail many Christians miss. Jesus kept the Feast of Dedication. John tells us He was walking in the temple during that feast, in winter, when the crowd gathered around Him and asked if He was the Christ.

> *Therefore the Jews surrounded Him and were saying to Him, "How long do You hold our soul in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works which I do in the name of My Father, these testify concerning Me. But you do not believe, for you are not of My sheep, even as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given* ***them*** *to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch* ***them*** *out of the hand of My Father. I and the Father are one."* (John 10:24-30)

Think about where He was standing. A temple that had been cleansed and rededicated after a pagan king tried to wipe out the worship of God. And there He told them that He and the Father are one. The temple had been rededicated to God. Now God Himself in the flesh was walking in it.

What the Maccabees Show Us

The Maccabees were not perfect men, and the dynasty that came from them went badly wrong, as the next chapter shows. But in the hour of testing, they would not bow. Many Bible teachers believe they are among the faithful whom Hebrews has in mind when it speaks of those who were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35). 2 Maccabees 7 tells of a mother and her seven sons who died rather than eat pork, each one saying God would raise them up again.

Study Questions

1. What did Mattathias refuse to do, and what did it cost him?
2. Read John 10:22-30. Why is it striking that Jesus said these words at this feast?
3. Where are you being pressed to give up what God has said, and what would faithfulness look like?

Chapter 5: Priest Kings and the Coming of Rome

> *And in the days of those kings the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and the kingdom will not be left to another people; it will shatter and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever*
>
> Daniel 2:44 (SLB)

Judas Maccabeus died in battle in 160 B.C. His brothers Jonathan and then Simon carried on, partly by fighting and partly by playing rival Seleucid kings against each other. In 142 B.C. the Jews won their freedom from Seleucid taxes, and the people made Simon high priest and leader. For the first time since the Babylonians, Judea was its own nation.

The family that ruled from then on is called the Hasmonean dynasty, after an ancestor of Mattathias. It lasted about eighty years, and it is a sad story.

When the Liberators Became the Problem

The Hasmoneans were priests from the family of Aaron, but they were not descendants of David. Even so, they made themselves kings as well as high priests. Many devout Jews were troubled by that.

Simon's son John Hyrcanus conquered the Samaritans and destroyed their temple on Mount Gerizim. He also conquered Idumea, the old land of Edom south of Judea, and Josephus says he forced the Idumeans to be circumcised and live as Jews. Keep that in mind. Herod the Great came from an Idumean family.

Later, Alexander Jannaeus ruled with great cruelty. Josephus says that after one rebellion he had eight hundred of his Jewish opponents crucified in Jerusalem while he feasted with his concubines. The men who had once fought pagan oppression had become oppressors themselves. Power without God's way always ends there.

Pompey Walks into the Holy of Holies

After Jannaeus died, his widow Salome Alexandra ruled for nine years, and then her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, fought a civil war for the throne. Both of them asked the Roman general Pompey to settle it. Pompey settled it his own way. In 63 B.C. he besieged Jerusalem, took the temple mount after three months, and walked into the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest could go once a year. Josephus says he touched nothing and ordered the temple cleansed the next day. The Roman historian Tacitus records that Pompey found no image of any god inside, only an empty place.

Judea was now under Rome. It would stay that way for the rest of the Bible.

The Fourth Kingdom

Daniel 2 describes a great statue: a head of gold, chest of silver, belly of bronze, and legs of iron. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he was the head of gold, and that three more kingdoms would follow. Read in order, they match Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then a stone cut without hands strikes the statue and becomes a mountain that fills the earth.

It was in the days of that fourth kingdom, Rome, that Jesus was born. His kingdom began then in the hearts of all who believe. And it will be set up in full when He returns to reign.

Study Questions

1. How did the Hasmonean rulers go from heroes to oppressors?
2. Read Daniel 2:44. What is different about God's kingdom compared to every human kingdom?
3. Why do you think God allowed Rome to rule Judea when Jesus came?

Chapter 6: Herod the Great

> *Now when Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in **the** days of Herod the king, look, Magi from **the** east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the **One** who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."*
>
> Matthew 2:1-2 (SLB)

Herod was the son of Antipater, an Idumean official who served the Hasmonean ruler Hyrcanus II and made himself useful to Rome. Herod was clever, ambitious, brave, and ruthless. In 40 B.C. the Roman Senate named him king of Judea. It took him three years and a Roman army to actually take Jerusalem, in 37 B.C. He ruled until his death, which most historians date to 4 B.C. A few argue for 1 B.C.

Studying who Herod really was, a paranoid and ruthless king, made his reaction to a newborn rival make complete sense. Reading the Bible literally and checking the history around it keeps me from missing what the text plainly shows. Knowing who Herod was turns a familiar Christmas passage into a real rescue.

A Builder and a Killer

Herod built on a grand scale. He built the port city of Caesarea on the coast, the fortress of Masada, the Herodium, and palaces all over his kingdom. His greatest project was the temple in Jerusalem. Josephus says he began rebuilding it in the eighteenth year of his reign, around 20 to 19 B.C. Work on the courts and buildings went on for decades. That is why the Jews told Jesus it had taken forty-six years to build.

> *Therefore the Jews said, "In forty and six years this sanctuary was built, and You will raise it up in three days?"* (John 2:20)

Herod was also a frightened and violent man. He had his wife Mariamne killed, along with her brother, her mother and grandfather, and three of his own sons. The Roman emperor Augustus is reported to have said it was better to be Herod's pig than his son, a play on words in Greek, since a Jew

would not eat pork. So when Matthew tells us that Herod ordered the boys of Bethlehem two years old and under to be killed, it fits everything else we know about him.

> *Then Herod, having seen that he had been mocked by the Magi, was greatly enraged; and having sent forth, he killed all the boys who* ***were*** *in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained exactly from the Magi.* (Matthew 2:16)

Herod's Sons

After Herod died, Rome divided his kingdom among three of his sons. Archelaus got Judea and Samaria, and was so harsh that Rome removed him in A.D. 6 and put Judea under a Roman governor. That is why Joseph took his family to Nazareth instead of going back to Judea (Matthew 2:22), and why Pontius Pilate was governing Jerusalem thirty years later. Herod Antipas got Galilee. He is the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and whom Jesus called "that fox." Philip got the lands northeast of the Sea of Galilee, where Caesarea Philippi was.

So by the time the Gospels open, everything is in place: a Roman governor in Jerusalem, a son of Herod in Galilee, a great temple, and a nation waiting for its Messiah.

Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 2:1-2 and 2:16. Why would a man like Herod be so threatened by a baby?
2. Herod built a magnificent temple but did not know God. What warning is there in that for us?
3. How does knowing about Herod's family help you read the Gospels?

Chapter 7: The People and Places of the Gospels

> *For Sadducees indeed say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but Pharisees confess both.*
>
> Acts 23:8 (SLB)

When you open the Gospels, you meet groups the Old Testament never names. Every one of them grew up in the silent years.

The Pharisees

The name most likely means “the separated ones.” They seem to come from the faithful Jews who stood with the Maccabees against Greek ways, and they first show up by name under the Hasmonean kings. They were mostly ordinary men, not priests, who were serious about keeping God’s law in everyday life. They believed in the resurrection, in angels, and in a body of oral tradition that explained how to keep the law. That tradition, the “tradition of the elders,” is what Jesus challenged when it set aside the commands of God (Mark 7:8-9). Many Pharisees became proud and hypocritical, and Jesus said so. But not all of them. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. So was Paul.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were the wealthy, priestly party, closely tied to the temple and the high priest’s family. They accepted the written law but rejected the oral tradition of the Pharisees, and they did not believe in the resurrection or in angels. Because they held power, they tended to cooperate with whoever ruled, first the Hasmoneans and later Rome. Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests who put Jesus on trial, came from these circles.

The Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Essenes are never named in the Bible, but Josephus and others describe them. They lived strict, separate lives, many of them in communities apart from the towns. Many scholars believe the community

at Qumran, near the Dead Sea, was a group of Essenes. In 1947 a shepherd found the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls in a cave there. Those scrolls include copies of every book of the Old Testament except Esther, many of them a thousand years older than any Hebrew copy known before. The great Isaiah scroll is dated to around 125 B.C. My book Dug Up and Written Down tells that story in more detail.

Zealots, Herodians and Tax Collectors

Some Jews wanted to throw off Rome by force. Josephus calls them a "fourth philosophy," started by Judas the Galilean, who led a revolt over a Roman census in A.D. 6 (Acts 5:37). One of Jesus' twelve apostles was Simon the Zealot. The Herodians supported the house of Herod and the Roman order that kept it in power. Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for Rome and often took extra for themselves, which is why their neighbors hated them. Jesus called one of them, Matthew, to follow Him.

Scribes and the Sanhedrin

The scribes were the experts in the law, the people's teachers. Many of them were Pharisees. The Sanhedrin was the ruling council in Jerusalem, made up of chief priests, elders and scribes, with the high priest at its head. It took the shape we see in the Gospels during these centuries.

The Synagogue

No one knows exactly when the synagogue began. Many think it started in the exile, when the Jews had no temple. The earliest written evidence we have is from Egypt, from inscriptions in the 200s B.C. that mention Jewish houses of prayer. By the time of Jesus there were synagogues all over the land and across the Roman world, where Jews met on the Sabbath to pray and hear the Scriptures read and explained. Jesus taught in them. Paul went to the synagogue first in nearly every city he visited. God had built a network of meeting places across the empire before the gospel ever went out.

Study Questions

1. Read Acts 23:8. What was the main difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees?
2. Why do you think so many religious leaders missed the Messiah when He came?
3. How did the synagogues help the gospel spread?

Chapter 8: The Fullness of Time

> *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, so that He might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.*
>
> Galatians 4:4-5 (SLB)

Paul wrote that God sent His Son "when the fullness of the time came." Looking back at the silent years, you can see what he meant. God had been getting the world ready.

As a project manager, I coordinate schedules so complex work comes together at the right window, and human schedules slip all the time. God aligned the Greek language, Roman roads and the scattered Jewish communities so the gospel could spread (Galatians 4:4). Nobody can arrange history on that scale except God.

- **One language.** Thanks to Alexander, people across the eastern half of the Roman world could speak and read the same common Greek. The New Testament could be written once and read everywhere.
- **The Scriptures in that language.** The Septuagint had put the Law and the Prophets into Greek before Jesus was born. A Greek reader in Corinth or Rome could open Isaiah and read about the Servant who would suffer for sins.
- **One empire and its roads.** Rome had brought peace across its lands, cleared the seas of pirates, and built roads that ran from Spain to Syria. Missionaries could travel farther and safer than ever before.
- **Synagogues everywhere.** Jews scattered across the world met each Sabbath to read the Scriptures. Paul had a place to start in nearly every city, and God-fearing Gentiles were already listening there.
- **A people waiting.** The silence, the suffering under Antiochus, the corruption of the priest kings, and the weight of Rome left many in Israel longing for God to keep His word.

People Who Were Waiting

Luke introduces us to some of them. Simeon was a righteous man in Jerusalem "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Anna, a widow of about

eighty-four, served in the temple night and day, and when she saw the baby Jesus she spoke about Him to everyone who was looking for redemption.

> *And there was Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of **the** tribe of Asher. She **was** advanced in many days, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she **was** a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, serving with fastings and petitions night and day. And she, having come up at that very hour, was giving praise in response to the Lord, and she was speaking concerning Him to all those waiting for redemption in Jerusalem.* (Luke 2:36-38)

For four hundred years the faithful had held on to Malachi's promise. Then an angel appeared to an old priest named Zechariah in that same temple and told him his son would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to children" (Luke 1:17). Those words come straight from Malachi's promise. The silence was over.

> ***The** beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, **the** Son of God. As it has been written in the prophets, "Look, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." "**The** voice of **one** crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of **the** Lord; make His paths straight.'" John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins.* (Mark 1:1-4)

God Is Never Late

If you are in a season where God seems silent, the silent years have something to say to you. God was not absent. He was working through kings who did not know Him, through wars and empires, through a translation project in Egypt and roads built by Rome. He was keeping His word the whole time. When the time was full, not one day early and not one day late, He sent His Son.

> *In many portions and in many ways God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the ages* (Hebrews 1:1-2)

He has spoken. And He has spoken in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again. The question now is not whether God will speak, but whether we will listen.

Study Questions

1. Which of the ways God prepared the world surprises you most?
2. Read Luke 2:25 and 2:36-38. What do Simeon and Anna teach us about waiting on God?
3. Read Hebrews 1:1-2. What does it mean that God has spoken to us in His Son?

A Closing Word

The silent years are not a gap in the story. They are the hallway between two rooms. On one side is the promise. On the other side is the Promised One. If you have read the Old Testament and wondered how the world of Malachi became the world of Matthew, I hope this short book has filled in that hallway for you.

If you want to go further, my Daniel Bible Study covers Daniel's visions of these empires verse by verse. Dug Up and Written Down tells how the Dead Sea Scrolls and other finds confirm the Bible. The Secret Things looks at the books of the Apocrypha and why they are not part of Scripture. And Foretold traces the prophecies of the Messiah from the Old Testament to Jesus.

Timeline of the Silent Years

All dates are approximate.

Date	What happened
539-538 B.C.	Cyrus of Persia takes Babylon and lets the Jews go home (Ezra 1).
516 B.C.	The second temple is finished (Ezra 6:15).
445 B.C.	Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem.
About 430 B.C.	Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet.
333-331 B.C.	Alexander the Great defeats Persia at Issus and Gaugamela.
323 B.C.	Alexander dies; his generals divide the empire.
301-198 B.C.	Judea under the Ptolemies of Egypt.
200s B.C.	The Law of Moses translated into Greek in Alexandria (the Septuagint).
200-198 B.C.	Antiochus III wins at Panium (200 B.C.); by 198 B.C. Judea passes to the Seleucids of Syria.
175 B.C.	Antiochus IV Epiphanes becomes king.
167 B.C.	Antiochus defiles the temple and outlaws the law; Mattathias revolts at Modein.
164 B.C.	Judas Maccabeus cleanses and rededicates the temple (Hanukkah).
142 B.C.	Judea gains independence under Simon; the Hasmonean dynasty begins.
About 125 B.C.	The Great Isaiah Scroll later found at Qumran is copied.
103-76 B.C.	Alexander Jannaeus rules; eight hundred opponents crucified.
63 B.C.	Pompey takes Jerusalem; Judea comes under Rome.
40-37 B.C.	Rome names Herod king; he takes Jerusalem in 37 B.C.
About 20 B.C.	Herod begins rebuilding the temple.
About 6-4 B.C.	Jesus is born in Bethlehem; Herod dies (most date it 4 B.C.).
A.D. 6	Archelaus removed; Judea under Roman governors.
About A.D. 28	John the Baptist begins to preach. The silence is broken.

Scripture Index

This index lists the Bible passages quoted or cited in this book. The numbers after each passage are chapter numbers. “Intro” is Before You Begin, and “Back” is the closing pages.

- **Ezra:** 6:15 (Back)
- **Nehemiah:** 8:8 (1)
- **Daniel:** 2:44 (5); 8:20-22 (2); 8:21 (2); 8:23-25 (3); 11:31 (3); 11:32-33 (3)
- **Amos:** 8:11 (Intro)
- **Malachi:** 3:1 (1); 3:16 (1); 4:5-6 (1)
- **Matthew:** 2:1-2 (6); 2:16 (6); 2:22 (6); 11:13-14 (1); 24:15 (3)
- **Mark:** 1:1-4 (8); 7:8-9 (7)
- **Luke:** 1:17 (8); 2:25 (8); 2:36-38 (8)
- **John:** 2:20 (6); 4:20 (1); 10:22-23 (4); 10:22-30 (4); 10:24-30 (4)
- **Acts:** 5:37 (7); 23:8 (7)
- **Galatians:** 4:4-5 (8)
- **2 Thessalonians:** 2:3-4 (3)
- **Hebrews:** 1:1-2 (8); 11:35 (4)

About This Book

Turn the page from Malachi to Matthew and about four hundred years go by. When the Old Testament closes, Persia rules the world and Jerusalem is a small, struggling town. When the New Testament opens, Rome is in charge, Herod is king, and the Gospels are full of Pharisees, Sadducees, synagogues and Samaritans the Old Testament never mentions. Where did they all come from?

The 400 Silent Years tells that story in plain words. Alexander the Great and the spread of Greek. The Bible translated into Greek. A Syrian king who set up an idol in the temple, just as Daniel foretold. The Maccabees, who fought back and rededicated the temple at the feast Jesus Himself attended. The priest kings who became tyrants, the coming of Rome, and Herod the Great.

Through it all, God was silent but never absent. He was preparing the world for His Son. Each short chapter ends with study questions for personal reading or a small group.