

# THE 400 SILENT YEARS<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The canon of the Old Testament closed with the prophecy of \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>2</sup> who was a contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah. Malachi was written about the year 432 BC.
2. From Malachi until the beginning of the New Testament, a period of a little more than 400 years, no inspired prophet arose in the land.
3. This period is very appropriately called the Period of Prophetic Silence. However, these 400 years were crowded with activity.

## II. THE POLITICAL SITUATION

### A. The Persians

1. The Jews fared well under Persian rule, even though they were no longer a free people. The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to their land in 539 BC, exactly 70 years after Daniel had been taken captive to Babylon.
2. The Temple was rebuilt and dedicated during the reign of Darius the Great.
3. In 445 BC, the \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> allowed the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. (See Daniel 9:20-27)
4. Judea was ruled by High Priests who were responsible to the Persian government. Contests for the office of High Priest were marked by jealousy, intrigue and even murder. Johanan, son of Joiada (Nehemiah 12:22) is reported to have slain his brother Joshua within the Temple precincts.
5. It was during this time that a Samaritan temple was built on Mt. Gerizim, which,

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Between the Testaments" by Charles F. Pfeiffer. *The Criswell Study Bible*. W.A. Criswell, Ph.D., ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 1083-1090.

<sup>2</sup> Malachi

<sup>3</sup> Decree of Artaxerxes

rather than Zion, was regarded as sacred by the Samaritan community.

## B. The Greeks

1. Palestine was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. He showed great consideration for the Jews, spared the city of Jerusalem, permitted the Jews to observe their laws, and granted them exemption from tribute during Sabbatical years.
2. In 331 BC, Alexander built the city of Alexandria in Egypt and encouraged Jews to settle there and gave them privileges comparable to those of his Greek subjects.
3. It was \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>4</sup> rather than Macedonian rule that was Alexander's legacy to the Middle East!

## C. The Ptolemies

1. When Alexander died in 323 BC, his empire was divided four ways. Judea was first subject to Antigonos, one of his generals, but it quickly fell to another general by the name of Ptolemy I Soter, who seized Jerusalem on a Sabbath day in 320 BC.
  - (“Soter” means “Deliverer”).
3. Under Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Alexandrian Jews translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This was called the Septuagint.
4. The greatest figure among the Jews of the Ptolemaic period was Simon the Just, who was the High Priest. He is credited with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and repairing the Temple.

## D. The Seleucids

1. The Syrian rulers are termed Seleucids because their kingdom, one of the successor states to Alexander's Empire, was founded by Seleucus I Nicator. Most of the early rulers bore the names of Seleucus or Antiochus and they ruled from Antioch on the Orontes River.

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<sup>4</sup> Hellenistic culture

2. Antiochus IV Epiphanes conquered Palestine in 199 BC, wresting control of the land from the Ptolemies after the Battle of Panion, near the sources of the Jordan River.
3. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was determined to remove all traces of orthodox Jewish faith. After conquering Jerusalem and slaughtering a large number of people, he desecrated the Temple, erected an image of Jupiter on the Temple altar and offered a swine in sacrifice.
4. The Seleucids were determined to force Hellenism upon the Jews, but now they had gone too far. The orthodox Jews were willing to die for their faith.

#### E. The Maccabees

1. The Maccabean Revolt was begun in 167 BC by the aged High Priest Mattathias who refused to offer a pagan sacrifice at the insistence of the emissaries of Antiochus at the village of Modin, about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem.
2. Mattathias soon died and his third son \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup> was chosen as military leader.
  - (“Maccabee” means “the hammer”).
3. In a surprise night attack, Judas annihilated an army of Syrians and Hellenistically-minded Jews at Emmaus, then marched to Jerusalem and conquered the city.
  - The Temple, which three years earlier had been desecrated, was now cleansed.
  - The Feast of Lights, or \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>6</sup> celebrates this cleansing and rededication.
4. During the 104 years of Hasmonean rule, the Jews were once again an independent nation. The land area under their control was expanded to approximately the territory controlled by Israel in the days of David and Solomon.
5. The last of the Hasmonean rulers during these years of independence were Hyrcanus II, who was both King and High Priest and his brother Aristobulus,

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<sup>5</sup> Judas the Maccabee

<sup>6</sup> Hanukkah

who was governor of Idumaea. Civil war between the brothers loomed.

## F. The Romans

1. Pompey appeared with his Roman legions to insure the peace of Judea and to further the aims of Rome. When Pompey suspected Aristobulus of planning to rebel against Rome, he besieged Jerusalem in 63 BC, thus ending more than a century of Hasmonean rule.
2. Hyrcanus II became ethnarch of Judea, Galilee, Idumaea and Perea. Aristobulus was taken captive to Rome. Hyrcanus II ruled from 63 to 40 BC.
3. Following years of strife, the Parthians temporarily conquered Jerusalem (40-37 BC) and installed Antigonus as High Priest and King.
  - Herod, the son of Antipater, who had inherited the throne of Judea at the death of Hyrcanus II, was forced to flee to Rome, where he won the favor of Anthony, who ruled Rome following the death of Julius Caesar.
  - Herod was now officially named \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>7</sup>
4. With Roman authority behind him, Herod the Great triumphantly entered Jerusalem and ruled from 37 to 4 BC, dying shortly after the birth of Jesus.
5. Herod the Great is best known for rebuilding the Temple on a grand scale, beginning in the eighteenth year of his reign.

## III. THE JEWISH SECTS

### A. The Pharisees

1. The word Pharisee means “\_\_\_\_\_.”<sup>8</sup> These were the orthodox and they date from the reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC) during the Maccabean period.
2. During the first century before Christ two influential Pharisaic teachers gave their names to two schools of legal thought:
  - Shammai, whose followers strictly followed the Law and were bitterly

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<sup>7</sup> the King of the Jews

<sup>8</sup> separated one

- opposed to Rome.
  - Hillel, whose followers were more moderate and were willing to accept Roman rule.
3. The Talmud preserves the record of 316 controversies between the schools of Shammai and Hillel.

#### B. The Sadducees

1. The Sadducees were the party of the Jerusalem \_\_\_\_\_<sup>9</sup> and the High Priesthood.
2. They did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or the miraculous so they were “sad, you see.”
3. While the Pharisees welcomed proselytes (Matthew 23:15), the Sadducean party was closed to everyone except the members of the High Priestly and aristocratic families of Jerusalem.
4. With the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the Sadducean party came to an end. Modern Judaism traces its roots to the Pharisees.

#### C. The Essenes

1. The Essenes, like the Pharisees, traced their roots to the orthodox leaders of the Maccabean times. The Essenes are never mentioned in the New Testament. They tended for the most part to have lived in monastic communities, such as Qumran, near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea.
2. Regarding themselves as the only true, or pure Israel, the Essenes refused to cooperate with what they believed to be the corrupt religious observances at the Jerusalem Temple.

#### D. The Herodians

1. The Herodians are mentioned in Matthew 22:16 and Mark 3:6. They constituted a political party, rather than a religious order among the Jews.

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<sup>9</sup> aristocracy

2. The Herodians appear to have been Jews of influence and standing who supported Herodian rule and, consequently, Roman rule.

#### E. The Zealots

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1. The Zealots are mentioned in Luke 6:15. They were at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the Herodians. They were super patriots who resisted Rome at all costs.
2. Their fanaticism brought on the Jewish revolt during which the army of Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple in the year AD 70, after which the Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. This was known as the \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. THE SAMARITANS

1. Neither a political party nor a religious sect, they were a mixed people resulting chiefly from the intermarriage of Babylonian colonists who were sent to Samaria after the ten northern tribes (Israel) were taken captive.
2. The orthodox Jews despised and avoided the Samaritans.

#### IV. THE SYNAGOGUE

1. The germ of the future synagogue is found in Ezekiel 11:16. Synagogues arose in the days of the \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>11</sup> They were places of worship and instruction.
2. The synagogue had its most rapid development during the age of the Maccabees. Their chief officer, who was usually a rabbi, was called the “ruler of the synagogue.”

#### V. THE SANHEDRIN

1. The Sanhedrin was the recognized headship of Jewish people in the days of Christ.

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<sup>10</sup> Diaspora

<sup>11</sup> captivity

2. Thought to have originated in the third century BC, it was composed of 70 members, mostly priests and nobles of the Sadducees, some Pharisees, scribes and elders, who were presided over by the High Priest.

## VI. THE COMING OF CHRIST

1. The Old Testament is the story of God's dealing with the Hebrew nation for the purpose of bringing into the world a Messiah for all nations.
2. At the time Jesus was born, the known world was ruled by the Roman Empire and world conditions were particularly suitable for the spread of a new faith. The Greek language was universally used and understood.
3. There was a general feeling of expectation among devout Jews that God would visit and deliver His people.
4. Malachi, the last prophetic utterance of the Old Testament, issues a prophecy, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple..." (Malachi 3:1).
5. This messenger is John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 1:2).
6. John the Baptist is considered to be the last of the Old Testament prophets.

