

Through the Bible Course

January 4, 1948

The Intertestamental Period

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- I. The Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi, written about 400 BC. For 400 years there is no record of God having sent any word to be written down for future use. This period is also referred to as “400 Silent Years.”
- II. At close of Old Testament we find that there were two great divisions of Israelites.
 1. One groups was scattered over a goodly portion of the world and were known as dispersion.
 2. Another group was a comparatively small remnant who lived in Palestine.
- III. The prophets had foretold a future blessing which was to come to Israel. This blessing was to come as the result of the coming of the Messiah. Certain great things had been said about this Messiah. He was to be of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the line of David. He was to be born in Bethlehem of a virgin.
 1. The Jews during these 400 years kept alive this Messianic hope, and it is said every home which could qualify hoped that He would be born into that family.
- IV. Political situation during these years.
 1. The captivity began under Babylonian rule.
 2. BC 537-333 under Persian rule
 3. BC 333 Syria fell under Grecian rule through conquests of Alexander the Great
 - a. Alexander’s kingdom was divided and there was constant war between the surrounding countries
 - b. Palestine was caught between Persia and Egypt as “between the anvil and the hammer” and so they witnessed almost continual warfare. They knew little of freedom or peace.
 4. BC 167-65 The Maccabean period when Palestine knew a degree of freedom
 - a. The beginning was when Mattathias, an aged priest, led a revolt against the temple.
 1. They had to flee into the mountains but by constantly harassing the Syrians they defeated them. They retook Jerusalem under Judas and purified and restored the temple.
 - b. Out of this period came the books known as The Apocrypha (writings of doubtful authorship or authority). These are generally accented by the Catholic Church as inspired, but are rejected by Protestants. The Apocryphal books are 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the rest of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch with Epistle of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasseh and 1, 2, 3, and 4 Maccabees.

1. One need only read these to see they are not on same footing as the inspired books of Bible.

c. Toward end of this period there came civil war among the family of Maccabees, and the Romans made Herod king under them in BC 33. He was still ruling when Christ was born.

5. Under Romans

a. Herod built many magnificent buildings, many of which were pagan temples. He finally erected the Jewish temple which was standing in time of Christ.

V. Certain important movements to be noted.

1. The Pharisees – They were a group which arose who put much emphasis upon observation of the Mosaic Law as well as upon the oral law or Talmud which had arisen during this period. They made legal observance the heart of religion and therefore made religion a matter of mechanics instead of the heart. They were very orthodox and kept alive during this period the expectation of the Messiah. They were not interested in the political situation except as it provided for them freedom of worship.

2. Sadducees – In contrast to the Pharisees, they were vitally interested in politics. Compared to the Pharisees they were secular and were made up largely of the priestly aristocrats and scribes. They denied many of the orthodox beliefs of Jews, notably the bodily resurrection.

3. Synagogues – Many of the Jews could have no contact with the temple. Therefore wherever there were many Jews they banded together and erected buildings where they met for worship and a reading and exposition of the Law.

4. The Septuagint – The Old Testament translated into Greek. This translation was made during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (BC 285-247) under the direction of Demetrius Phalereous, the librarian of Alexandria. This book greatly influenced the spread of Gospel because it made the Hebrew scriptures available to all who could read Greek.

5. The Samaritans – They consisted of a mixture of Jews and heathen who were imported by various rulers to denationalize the Jews. These peoples mixed their pagan worship with that of Jehovah and so had a synthetic religion. When the Jews under Nehemiah refused to allow this mixed race to have any part in the temple worship, they built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim (John 4). They occupied the territory north of Judea and south of Galilee. There was great enmity between the Samaritans and Jews.

Conclusion: It was into such a situation and under such conditions that Christ was born into the world.