

THE TIME BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

BIBLE SURVEY

Between the close of the Old Testament with the Book of Malachi and the opening of the New Testament with the Book of Matthew about four hundred years elapsed. During this time, God was still working with the Jewish people and leading up to the coming of Jesus Christ. All of the history of that period is recorded for us in books which are not part of the Bible, not part of the Canon, but which belong to the portion which is called the Apocrypha. These books, though they are not part of the Scripture, contain interesting history and for the most part accurate history of the four hundred years between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

I thought it would be interesting in one of our messages in this series of Bible Survey to survey the history of those four hundred years. We have a number of books in the Apocrypha--historical book, teaching books, romantic books, prophetic books. In these books we learn some of the history of this period.

First of all there was the Persian Period with which the Old Testament closed. You remember that Cyrus had allowed the Jewish people to go back from Babylon to Palestine to rebuild their temple and their city. They had gone back under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, but the rulers that were ruling at this time were Persians. But the Persian power soon declined because of unseccuessful war with Greece and because of corruption within the Empire.

The Persian period was succeeded by the period of rule by the Greeks. This began about 332 B.C. and continued until the Romans took over in 63 B. C. Undoubtedly the best known of the Greek rulers was Alexander the Great who conquered the world--Alexander the Great who came into Jerusalem to conquer it and according to the story who spared the city because the high priest came out and showed him a prophecy about himself. This prophecy had been written four hundred years before in the Book of Daniel. The story says that when Alexander saw this prophecy, he spared the city of Jerusalem. The prophecy which the high priest showed him on that day was from the eighth chapter of Daniel and it tells about the Grecian Empire which would succeed the Persians as the world ruler. In the fifth verse of Daniel eight, Daniel saw a he goat coming up from the west on the face of the whole earth; the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. In verse twenty-one, this prediction is explained. The goat is the king of Greece and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. The story says that when Alexander saw that and realized that hundreds of years before, God through the Scriptures of these people had spoken and prediced of Alexander, he spared the city. Alexander died, you remember, as a very young man and his kingdom was divided among his generals.

The two empires that succeeded Alexander which are of interest to Bible history are first the Ptolomies who got Egypt and that part of the world and Selucids who got Syria to the north and east of Palestine. Palestine lying between Syria and Egypt was really between two very great powers; whenever they fought each other Palestine could always guarantee that it would lose. So the Jewish people were not very well cared for in those days because they were between one enemy on

the north and another enemy on the south. One of the most infamous of the rulers of the day was Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled in the middle of the 100's B. C. The Jews were so oppressed by this man that when they heard he had been killed in Egypt they opened a great celebration; when he learned that they were celebrating (the report was false) he killed forty thousand Jewish people. This shows something of the wickedness of Antiochus Epiphanes. He was also the man who came into Jerusalem and killed a pig and offered this unclean animal on the altar of burnt offerings and poured a broth made of the flesh of the pig over the Holy of Holies. This ended temple worship in Jerusalem for three years as was predicted also in Daniel 11:31.

God did not leave His people without a leader. The leader was found in a family called the Maccabees. The Maccabees, the most famous of whom was Judas Maccabees, led the Jewish people in revolt against the oppressive rulers under whom they were being enslaved. Finally, three years after the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas led a successful revolt so that the Temple was re-dedicated in 165 B. C. with a new altar, and the lamps of the golden candlestick were lighted once again. The Jewish people still celebrate this re-dedication of the Temple in 165. This is a time when they light candles in remembrance of the day that the Temple was re-dedicated under Judas' successful revolt. The Jews then regained control of their own land for about 100 years, but corruption again set in with loss of power so that the Romans took over. In 63 B. C. the Roman Empire came upon the scene of world history as the conquerer of Palestine.

The religion of this period between the Testaments is a story of divisions and sects within Judaism. It was during this era that the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes and the scribes and the Herodians arose within Judaism. The Pharisees were a separatist group. They were very careful and particular about all of their life and activity. The Sadducees were a group who were rather liberal in their views. They did not believe in the supernatural. Therefore, they denied angels and the resurrection; you read about them and their beliefs in Acts 23:8. The Essenes were a rather ascetic group. They were reacting against the externalism of the Pharisees and the worldliness of the Sadducees. The Dead Sea Scrolls coming from the Qumran community probably come from an Essene community.

The Scribes were all members of the Pharisees but the scribes were a profession within the sect of the Pharisees. The profession that the scribes performed was that of teaching and interpreting and judging the law. The Herodians were the political action Jews of the day who co-operated with the Romans and sought to gain favor for Jews by courting favor with the Romans. This was something of the religious life that developed in the inter-Testament period and the religious life which we see reflected in the Gospel Accounts.

What can we learn from these four hundred years of history between the Old and the New Testaments? Well, we can learn several things-- first, that God fulfilled His prophetic Word as He always does. The history of this period was pre-written by Daniel in the eighth and eleventh chapters of his prophecy and here is brought to pass every

time detail appears and the things that he predicted would happen of this period. We also learn that even in the darkest days there are always some who are faithful to God. The Maccabees are an outstanding example of those who were faithful to Him in these difficult days of depression for the Jewish people. We also learn that even the people who will gain victory the hard way, who we would think had learned lessons the hard way, still tend to corrupt true religion. The sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the others show of the corruption of the truth of God that had come down to them through the Old Testament. But most of all I think we learn that God was doing in these four hundred years what He said He would do in the preparing for the coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything was being used to prepare the time for the entrance into the world of Jesus Christ. Alexander the Great contributed the spread of a universal language--Greek, thought the world so that when the first missionaries went out they could communicate to practically everybody without having to take years to learn new languages. Rome contributed a number of things--good roads, good laws which would in turn protect the early Christians. Everything was being prepared. Religion was corrupt and at a low ebb and the Jewish people were oppressed under the Romans. Everything was prepared for the deliverer who would come--Jesus Christ. So we read in Galatians 4:4 "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons." The mistake that so many people made in those days was that they were looking for a national redeemer. They did not realize that their real need was for a spiritual redeemer who could forgive their personal sins. The Bible is very clear that the purpose of Christ's coming was to redeem us that we might receive the adoption as sons of God. So God prepared everything for the entrance of the Redeemer into the world in the coming of the person of Jesus Christ. If you do not know that Redeemer today, and you will open your heart to Him, He will come in and save you from your sins.