

C2C34 – 400 “Silent” Years

In speaking of the life of Christ, Paul wrote to the Galatians saying, “... ***when the time had fully come, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under law.***”

Here we have a summary of the things that had to come together to present the ‘right conditions’ for the life, ministry and saving work of Christ:

- **It was “at just the right time”**; God’s appointed time for these events to take place,
- **God sent His Son** - the one who pre-existed as God the Son came from heaven,
- **Born of a woman** - as the source of His humanity
- **Born under law** - as one who would fulfil the law and bring this dispensation to an end.

This morning, in this last message in this series, I want to pick up on the first of these thoughts and the implications of the words, “***when the time had fully come.***”

The Old Testament Canon of Scripture concludes with the book of **Malachi** written somewhere between 440 and 420 BC.

By this time in Jewish history, the **exiles had returned** from the time of their Babylonian captivity, the **temple had been rebuilt** and **priests who were direct** descendants of Aaron, led worship and performed the sacred rites.

In the political sphere, while **Zerubbabel was the ‘lawful successor’** to the royal throne of David, Israel remained without a king, a nation **under the dominion of the Medo-Persian Empire.**

And while the people **struggled to keep God's law**, at that time they were **relatively united in their beliefs and practices as a nation.**

The closing verses of Malachi read like this, ***(Mal 4:5-6) “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. [6] He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of***

the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

The very next words Israel hears from a Prophet of God comes 400 years later with John the Baptist (whom Jesus referred to as "***the Elijah who was to come***") came preaching in the desert of Judea, (***Mat 3:2***) "***... saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

But this was a different world indeed from that which existed at the conclusion of the Old Testament! And while many have called these the "400 Silent years", we should not be misled into thinking that nothing of significance was taking place.

Indeed, by the time of the birth of Christ:

- **Rome** had become the dominant world power
- **The Jews were ruled** as a puppet state by a descendant of Esau - **Herod the Great**
- **The position of high priest** was sold and appointed under political patronage
- **Greek was the trade language** of the world

- and while the **TEMPLE** was still the centre of Jewish worship, **synagogues** had sprung up in every Jewish city!

In understanding New Testament events and culture, it is helpful to consider something of the way these changes came about.

The 1st major event came at the height of Persian power. In **334 BC**, the then **22-year-old leader of Greece, Alexander the Great**, defeated the Persian armies in a battle that changed the course of history. This was the battle of Granicus. (**See You-Tube "The Battle of Granicus"**)

READ: Daniel 8:4-7, 20-21

This was written 200 years before this time!

Within 18 months Alexander had led his armies South **towards Egypt** conquering all in his path. **According to first century Jewish historian, Josephus**, the Greek king planned to lay siege to Jerusalem (**Antiquities, Book 11, Chapter 8:4-5**).

As his armies approached, **the high priest, warned by God in a dream**, with the other priests went out to meet the King dressed in the clothing they would use in Ministry at the temple. **Alexander, seeing the people dressed in white garments, came forward to meet them.**

On seeing the gold plate on the High Priest's headpiece on which the name of God was engraved, the account says he ***“adored that name”***. He told one of his leaders that he adored God because **he also had had a dream** in which he had seen the high priest standing before him telling him that he would be given dominion over the Persians. **Alexander then entered the city** and in the temple **he offered sacrifice to God with great respect.**

When shown the book of Daniel declaring that ***“one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended.”*** He then showed favour to the Jews, granting their requests.

Alexander died 323 BC without an heir.

A series of wars followed which eventually led to Alexander's empire being divided by the four generals who had led his armies.

READ: Daniel 8:8, 22

Two of them are of particular note to us:

Ptolemy, who ruled over **Egypt** and North Africa and **Seleucus**, who ruled over **Syria**.

The land of the Jews was then annexed by Egypt and suffered greatly under the rule of Ptolemy. Battles raged between **Syria to the North** side of the land of Israel and **Egypt to the South** for the next 100 years.

During this time, **Grecian influence** was gaining strength in Israel. Among the Jews, there arose a group known as **the Hellenists** who promoted **Greek culture and thought and who sought to liberalise some of the Jewish laws.**

This cultural shift led to the rise of a **counter movement which resisted all forms of foreign influence on the teachings of Moses.**

This group insisted on the preservation of tradition and became known as the Pharisees, meaning “**those separated**” or “**set apart**”.

As the years passed they grew stronger and more legalistic in their ideas. By the time of Christ, this group had created several additional ‘laws’ of their own to prevent the real laws being broken. They were by this time, dogmatic yet hypocritical, keeping the outward form of the law but not the spirit of the law.

Jesus would later say to them, *(Mat 23:27-28)*
“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. [28] In the same way, on the outside you appear to

people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

At the same time, **the Hellenists - who freely embraced all things Greek** -formed their own party known as the Sadducees.

Though few in number, they were **people of wealth and influence and tended to control the position of the high priest** which could be bought and sold. This was the liberal group who **turned away from a strict interpretation of the law and who ceased to believe in the supernatural.** In the Ministry of Christ, many times they came with questions about the supernatural, seeking to put Jesus to the test.

(Mat 22:23-32) ... the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. [24] “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. [25] Now there were seven brothers among us.

(they all married the woman but die without children) **[27] Finally, the woman died.**

[28] Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" [29] Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. [30] At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. [31] But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, [32] 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Another significant group in Jewish life was the **Scribes or Teachers of the Law**. Long before the time of photocopiers or printing presses, these men copied the word of God over and over with extreme care. The term **SCRIBE implied education and religious fervour** and was more

of a job description than a religious or political grouping.

During this time, in Egypt, in the reign of one of the **Ptolemies**, the **Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language**. This took place in about **284 BC**.

When the work was finished, it was known as "**The Septuagint**" or "**LXX**", supposedly because it was translated by **70 scholars**. Many Old Testament quotations in the New Testament derive from the **LXX** rather than the original Hebrew.

Around 203 BC, AntiochusThe Great came to power in Syria (remember to the North) and **Jerusalem was captured from the Egyptians**.

After his death, there arose another king (his son) whose name in Jewish history has always been held in utter contempt. This king was **Antiochus Epiphanes**, and he ruled the land of Israel from 175 BC.

He was one of the most vicious and violent persecutors in the history of the Jews.

Sometimes referred to as the **Antichrist of the Old Testament**, **this man** fulfils some of the predictions of Daniel concerning a coming world leader who would be a vile and boastful king.

His first act in Israel was to depose the high priest in Jerusalem, thus ending the centuries old hereditary line of priests. In its place, he commenced the practice of selling the office of high priest.

As time passed, he attempted to destroy all worship of the true God, ordering the Jewish people to reject their God, their religion, their customs and their beliefs and to worship the Greek gods.

In 167 BC, upon hearing a report that Antiochus had been killed in battle, all Jerusalem rejoiced and they overthrew the false high priest put in place by Antiochus. However the King was very

much alive and he swept back with his armies and attacked Jerusalem with terrible vengeance.

READ: Dan 8:9-12, 23-24

Some 40,000 people were killed and a similar number were sold into slavery.

Antiochus then destroyed many scrolls of the Law, entered the Temple in Jerusalem, and **sacrificed a pig on an altar.**

That desecration triggered a rebellion by a group of Jews led by the **priest Mattathias** and his five sons. When Mattathias died in 166 B.C., the leadership went to his son Judas, who was nicknamed "**the Maccabee**" which means "**the hammer.**" The name Maccabee was also used for other members of the family who took part in the uprising.

READ: Dan 8:13-14

After an amazing series of victories through the land, they gained control of The Temple and cleansed and rededicated it to The God of Israel.

This took place on **25th Kislev 165 BC** and the victory and purification of The Temple is **commemorated by Jews to this day with the annual Festival of Hanukkah**.

Website ***Chanukah on the Net*** tells us:
When Judah and his followers finished cleaning the temple, they wanted to light the eternal light, known as the N'er Tamid, which is present in every Jewish house of worship. Once lit, the oil lamp should never be extinguished.

Only a tiny jug of oil was found with only enough for a single day. The oil lamp was filled and lit. Then a miracle occurred as the tiny amount of oil stayed lit not for one day, but for eight days.

Jews celebrate Chanukah to mark the victory over the Syrians and the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. The Festival of the Lights, Chanukah, lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil. The word Chanukah means "rededication".

The Jews were then ruled by the priests for almost 100 years until, in **63 BC, the Roman general Pompey invaded Jerusalem** and set up a puppet Idumaeon King on the throne.

His name was **Antipater**. His son in turn was known as **Herod the great, King of Judea**. **This man** was a cruel King who was a follower of the Jewish religion in name only. **Under ROME'S authority** he and his descendants would rule a resentful Jewish world for the next 100 years.

Among some Jews, there was now a mixture of despair and expectancy as many looked for the fulfilment of prophecy in the coming of the promised Messiah.

With these things in place, "The time had fully come". The world's stage was set for the coming of the most important person in all the history of mankind! It was into this changed and difficult world for the Jews, that **Jesus, the Messiah, was born**.

Having considered world kingdoms and their influence, we close with prophecy concerning the **LAST great Kingdom where King Jesus will sit on an everlasting throne**.

READ: Daniel 7:13-14