

Route 66

The Silent Years

October 3, 2010



We're looking at the period *between* the Old and New Testaments. Did you know there's about 425 years between Malachi (the *last* book of the OT) and the events in Matthew (the *first* book of the NT)? These four centuries are known as the *silent years*, because Malachi is the last prophet to speak until John the Baptist.

But, I don't think it's fair to call them *silent*. Because, in the book of Daniel, God speaks plainly about what's going to occur during this extended *period of preparation*.



And I'm calling it a "period of preparation" because of something we read in Galatians:

But **when the time had fully come**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. - *Galatians 4:4-5 NIV*

Obviously this time had *not* "fully come" in Malachi's day, but it had "fully come" by Matthew's. Something *had* to be prepared. So, the question is: what *were* these preparations (during those 425 years) that paved the way for the Messiah? Turns out, some pretty *amazing* stuff!

The OT leaves off with the northern nation, Israel, exterminated and assimilated. In fact, the term *Israelite* isn't used to this day; today, people from Israel are known as *Israelis*.

The southern nation, Judah, returns from exile (when the Persians conquer Babylon) and they rebuild the temple. But, the Ark of the Covenant, having been hidden or taken, is never recovered. The term *Judahite* is shortened to *Jew* and the new name sticks.

This is a time of relative peace and prosperity for the Jews.



Now, Daniel had prophesied that a shaggy, one-horned goat (from the west) was going to attack and defeat a two-horned ram. (8:5-7)

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. - *Daniel 8:20-21 NIV*



Alexander the Great

This king turned out to be Alexander the Goat, er, the Great. At the age of twenty (336^{BC}), Alexander assumes command of the Greek army and sweeps eastward. And within ten years the whole world lay at his feet.

According to the ancient historian, Josephus, when Alexander went to Judah (332^{BC}), he shocked his men by saluting the high priest (who wore the priestly garments, headdress, and gold plate with God's name. When asked why he had done this, Alexander explained that *before* his campaign, a man had come to him in his dreams and given him his strategy; and the man was dressed exactly like this!

So Alexander goes to the temple and is instructed how to make an appropriate sacrifice. And he is shown the passage in Daniel that says that a Greek will destroy the Medo-Persian Empire. Josephus says Alexander supposed himself to be that man.

Alexander leaves Judah untouched, allows the practice of Judaism throughout his kingdom, accommodates the religious practices of his Jewish soldiers, and charges *no* tribute every seventh year.¹

Alexander imposes Greek culture and language throughout his empire. And for the first time in history, there's a common, international language allowing nations to readily communicate.

But, Daniel's prophecy goes on to say that although the shaggy goat will become great, at the height of its power the horn/king will be broken off and replaced with four lesser horns/kings.

The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation ... - *Daniel 8:22a NIV*

Alexander died unexpectedly at the age of 32 (June 323^{BC}) and his newly formed empire was divided between his *four* Generals.



Ptolemy I, Soter



Ptolemy II, Philadelphus

Ptolemy [TAHL-uh-mih] Soter [SOH-tehr] rules Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, including Judah. And so many Jews move to Egypt, that Alexandria becomes the Jewish Religious center.

When Ptolemy's son Philadelphus comes to power (285^{BC}), he commissions the Septuagint to be written.

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

¹ This entire incident is recorded in: *Antiquities of the Jews*, by Josephus Flavius, Book XI, Chapter 8, paragraphs 4-5.



2nd Century Septuagint

It takes about 150 years to complete. But, for the first time in human history, the Hebrew Bible is written in a language that *anyone* in the ancient world can understand.

Jewish prophecy is becoming *internationally* known and studied.

But, the Jews are being “Hellenized”. They’re increasingly incorporating Greek culture; and in danger of being assimilated.

But then the Seleucids [seh-LOO-sids] gain control of Judah (198^{BC}).

Daniel’s prophecy goes on to warn that one of the four horns will sprout another horn that’ll cause astounding devastation.



Antiochus IV, Epiphanes

It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host ... He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. - *Daniel 8:11a; 25a NIV*

This “fifth horn” is the Seleucid king, Antiochus [an-TIGH-ah-kuhs] Epiphanes [ih-PIF-uh-nee-z], a title he gave to himself which means: The Visible God. He was often called Antiochus *Epimane’s*: The Insane.

Just as Haman attempted in Queen Esther’s day, and Hitler attempted in our day, Antiochus Epiphanes decided to wipe out the Jews.

His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. - *Daniel 11:31 NIV*

In 168^{BC} Antiochus loots the temple, kills 40,000 Jews, enslaves another 40,000, destroys their Bibles, outlaws Judaism, erects an altar to Zeus in the Temple, and sacrifices a pig on it. Now *that’ll* get your attention!

An angel had told Daniel how long this vision concerning the daily sacrifice and the surrender of the sanctuary will last.

He said to me, “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.” - *Daniel 8:14 NIV*

“2,300 evenings and mornings” refers to the number of evening and morning *sacrifices* that’ll be missed. So, that’s 2,300 *divided* by two per day, or 1,150 days; just over three years.

A Jewish warrior named Judas Maccabeus rises in revolt, and wins battle after battle against unbelievable, impossible odds, with untrained soldiers and *without* equipment.

And in 165^{BC} - just over three years - he retakes Jerusalem and purifies the temple.



This is celebrated each year as *Hanukkah* (i.e. “dedication”).

This incident brings an uncompromising faithfulness among many Jews and an unparalleled fervor for the Messiah, spreading everywhere the knowledge of God and the hope of a coming Savior.

Daniel ends his fifth-horn prophecy with these words:

... he will be destroyed, but not by human power. – *Daniel 8:25b NIV*

Antiochus Epiphanes, the visible god, died suddenly of a disease in 163^{BC}, and a 100 year, peaceful, Maccabean reign followed, though, sadly, the ensuing Maccabeans are ungodly and corrupt.

And Daniel is so overwhelmed by his vision he becomes ill. (8:27) Daniel also had a vision of Babylon, Persia, and Greece as three wild beasts. He then saw a terrifying fourth, the last of the world dominating powers, but he wasn’t given its name.



It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. – *Daniel 7:7b NIV*

Note that it has “iron teeth”; in Daniel’s vision of the four-part statue, this same power is represented by *iron legs*. The last ancient superpower is Rome, known as the *iron monarchy*.

In 63^{BC}, Rome takes Judah’s independence. And Israel won’t gain it back until 1947! Only by the hand of God can a nation survive intact, *without* a homeland, for 2000 years!



Rome extends an iron-fisted control over the world like never before experienced. They build 50,000 miles of networked roads throughout the known world (compare this to our 47,000 mile interstate system).

Hence the old saying: “All roads lead to Rome”.



Ancient Roman Road

Roman soldiers patrol the roads and keep them safe to travel, which later allows the Gospel to spread from Spain to India, and letters to be sent to distant believers. And many of these letters become our NT. The message of salvation was written with precise exactness in the Greek trade language, and spread on Roman roads.

Shortly after the Gospel was spread (180^{AD}), Rome began to fall apart and the roads were no longer maintained or protected.

And travel wasn't possible like that again until modern times.

So, *these* are the necessary preparations that paved the way:

1. A universal, worldwide language.
2. Spreading Jewish believers (throughout the world).
3. Hebrew Scripture translated (into the universal language).
4. An eager anticipation (for the Messiah to arrive).
5. A huge network of safe roads (to connect the world).
6. One government (so you can travel without losing your life).

Before I began studying, I wondered why it took God so long to show up. Now I wonder how He got so much done in so little time using the free will of unbelievers and ancient technology.

There can be suffering while God works things out to our eternal best. But, He's always sovereign and He's always present. So, until He fully reveals His sovereign work, our deepest joy has to be in His intimate presence and His unfailing love.

At any given moment, things can seem like they're spinning out of control. But these 400 years gives me renewed confidence that God is skillfully handling my world, my country, and my life.

His voice may have been silent, but His hand, as Daniel makes clear, is always consistently directing the course of history.