



PRAYING WITH PURPOSE MINISTRIES

THE INTER-TESTAMENT PERIOD

Prelude to the First Coming of Jesus the Christ by William Southerland

Let's start by comparing some of the circumstances that existed when the Old Testament closed with those that existed when the New Testament opened.

At the close of the Old Testament, Persia was the World power and Judah was a province of Persia. When the New Testament opens, Rome was the world power and Judah (Judea) was a province of Rome. Also, it was under the physical occupation of the Roman Army. Judah is now generally referred to as Judea.

At the close of the Old Testament, the Aaronic line of High Priesthood was still intact. When the New Testament opens, the Aaronic line of High Priesthood has ended ... In the New Testament the High Priest was essentially a political appointee of the reigning king.

At the close of the Old Testament, the Jewish society is unified. When the New Testament opens, the Jewish society is divided into multiple groups, primarily the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5 as follows:

"⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

You can look at the changes in circumstances between the Old and New Testaments as God's final preparation for His set time for the first coming of His Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah.

In discussing the inter testament period, I have decided to divide those approximately 400 years into 5 segments.

435 BC – 330 BC

The first segment runs from about ... 435 BC–330 BC ... and I call this period the 'quiet before the storm'.

The Book of Malachi closes at about 435 BC. At that time, the Jewish people seemed to have come to grips with the fact that they are no longer a free and independent nation and have resigned themselves to make the best of an undesirable situation.

And for the next 100 years or so, they enjoyed generally quiet and peaceful lives under the watchful eye of the Persian empire.

330 BC – 323 BC

The next segment is relatively short and only runs from 330 BC–323 BC. I call this segment ‘storm clouds arising’.

After conquering the Persian empire in about 330 BC, Alexander the Great showed kindness to the Jewish nation.

In return for his kindness, some people developed a strong pro-Greek attitude which ushered in the Hellenistic movement and over the course of time, this movement led to the development of the group or party known as the Sadducees.

At the same time there were other people that felt that the best path for Judah to follow was to adhere strictly to the teachings and traditions of the Mosaic law and Jewish culture. These people opposed the Hellenistic movement and over the course of time developed into the group known as the Pharisees.

So, while the world dominance of Alexander extended a time of kindness and peace to the nation of Judah, his actions also laid the foundation for the subsequent divisions among the Jewish people.

323 BC – 204 BC

The next time interval runs from 323 BC–204 BC. I call this period ‘I can see the clouds and I can hear the thunder — storms-a-coming...’

After Alexander the Great’s death in 323 BC, his vast kingdom was divided among his top four generals: Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Cassander, and Selenus.

These are the four notable ones which are described in the eighth chapter of the Book of Daniel.

Ptolemy obtained the Egyptian empire and Selenus obtained the Syrian empire. Syria and Egypt both wanted to add Judah to their kingdoms. And they fought a bitter war to decide who would gain control of Judah. In the end, Ptolemy was successful, and Judah was annexed to the Egyptian empire.

This victory started 100 years of war between the Egyptian and Syrian kingdoms.

204 BC – 165 BC

The next segment of the Inter Testament period runs from 204 BC–165 BC. I call this segment ‘stormy weather and didn’t it rain’.

In about 203–204 BC, Syria finally captured Jerusalem from the Egyptian kingdom which began the period of Syrian rule over Judah.

The Syrians treated the Jewish people with great hostility, much worse than what they experienced under Egyptian rule.

Under Syrian rule, the Aaronic line of High Priests was ended, and the temple was desecrated as prophesied in Daniel chapter 8:9–14.

167 – 63 BC

The next interval runs from 167–63 BC..., and I call this segment ‘a shelter in the storm’.

This period is best characterized as the Maccabean period and was started at about 167 BC when Judas Maccabeus led a Jewish revolt against the Syrian army. In 165 BC, they re-captured the city of Jerusalem and the temple was cleansed and rededicated 2300 days after its desecration, as was predicted in Daniel chapter 8.

Eventually, the Maccabeans were able to take control of the entire land of Judah, which made it an independent state.

The Maccabean period still to this day is revered as a point of national pride for the Jewish people.

During the almost 100 years of war between the Maccabean and Syrian armies, Rome became the most dominant world power.

However, under Maccabean rule, the divide between Pharisees and Sadducees grew to the point of war between them. However, neither side could defeat the other and they both appealed to the Roman General Pompey for help in defeating the other.

The end result of these appeals to Pompey is that he marched his army into Judah and took control of the nation without regard to either Pharisees or Sadducees. This happened in about 63 BC and from that time on..., Judah was nothing more than a province of Rome. Roman soldiers patrolled the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, as they were still doing when Jesus arrived.

Also, it was during the Roman occupation that Judah became known as Judea.

It is interesting that this hatred between the Pharisees and Sadducees persisted even during the time of Jesus, yet both of these groups who hated each other, were united in their opposition to Jesus.

63 BC — until Jesus arrives

The final segment is from 63 BC — until Jesus arrives. I call this segment ‘the storm is over..., now’.

After Pompey had succeeded in the takeover of Judah and converting it to a Province of Rome, Herod, a descendent of Esau was appointed as governor of Jerusalem.

In 44 BC after Julius Caesar was assassinated, Herod was promoted to tetrarch of Judea and then to king of Judea.

After being appointed king in 40 BC, the Romans provided Herod with an army and told to maintain his own title by force.

Herod heeded those words with vicious and ruthless precision.

He murdered anyone who he thought might be a threat or challenge to him, this even included family members.

For example, he murdered his uncle, his wife, his wife’s brother, and his brother-in-law’s mother. Additionally, in around 6 BC, Herod assassinated 3 of his sons..., all to remove any threats to his hold on to power.

He added the title of ‘Magnus’ to his name or in other words he became known as ‘Herod the Great.’

In about 4 BC, two years after Herod murdered his sons, Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, appeared to Zechariah and told him, that he would have a son and his name would be John.

Also, in that year, the angel Gabriel went to the Virgin Mary and said to her, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”

And before the year was over, three wise men from the east came knocking on Herod’s door saying: “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

At last..., God’s ‘set time’ had finally come!

During the Inter-Testament period, it was the suffering, neglect and powerlessness of the common people which grew to a point that they literally had no hope in anyone or of any kind, except for the hope of the coming Messiah, Jesus, The Christ...!!! And God’s sincere and true worshippers were motivated to pray unceasingly for the coming of the promised Messiah.

Luke 2:38 indicates that the Prophetess Anna was in the temple day and night and when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus into the temple, “*she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*”

Another example of God’s sincere and righteous people praying for the coming Messiah is Simeon..., as described in Luke 2:25–32:

“²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss^[d] your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

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