

Week 47
Silent Years – Time Between The Testaments

Key Verse: Mark 4:24-25 “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

Introduction:

This period of time has been referred to as the Silent Years, or the Time between the Testaments, and is so named because during that time there was no new prophecy from God—no prophets giving nor receiving any new messages from God to be included in Scripture. However, these years were anything but silent. During this week we will spend our time uncovering what God was doing during this time and how He was speaking to the people. We will quickly learn that God was speaking.

The book of Malachi, and the Old Testament, closes with a promise from God:

“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).

This verse is a prophecy regarding John the Baptist. It is the announcement to his dad of John’s soon-to-occur miraculous conception that breaks the 400 years of silence. Between the time of these verses in Malachi and the breaking of the silence at the opening of the New Testament we have no Scripture to tell us the stories of what happened. However, we do have Scriptures that prophesy what would happen during these 400 years and there are documented historical facts of events that occurred during this time – and, of course, God’s prophetic Word has proven true. So true that in Daniel 11 there are many prophecies that were fulfilled so precisely that some want to claim they were written as the events unfolded.

For better understanding of this era, begin by reading the article included with this lesson, “THE 400 YEARS BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.”

During this 400-year period, Judah was under six different governments as follows:

Years	Empire	Major Events
539-331 BC	Persian	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Judah’s exiles allowed to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the altar, temple, and walls of Jerusalem.• Esther became queen of Persia in 479 BC.
331-320 BC	Greek (Alexander the Great)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alexander was recognized as a god, setting the precedent for other rulers.• Beginning of Hellenism (humanistic and classical ideals associated with ancient Greece and including reason, the pursuit of knowledge and the arts, moderation, civic responsibility, and bodily development).• Was told by Priest Jaddua (whose name is mentioned in Nehemiah 10:21) that Daniel prophesied Alexander’s victories

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		<p>(see story on pages 2-3 of handout, “400 Years Between the Old and New Testaments”).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alexander’s accomplishments were prophesied in Daniel – see 8:5-8 and 20-22, and 11:3-4. • After the death of Alexander the Great there was the rise of his four generals – fulfilling Daniel 8:8, 8:20-22, and 11:4.
320-198 BC	Ptolemies of Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Testament was translated into Greek beginning about 285 BC. • Jews had religious freedom in a setting of economic oppression.
198-142 BC	Seleucids of Syria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiochus IV Epiphanes took the throne in 175-163 BC and sought to impose unified Hellenistic culture and religion; he was called Antichrist of the Old Testament. • He slaughtered the Jews. • In December 167 BC, Antiochus erected a statute of Zeus in the Temple at the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed unclean animals there (pigs). • He is like the “small horn” of Daniel 8:23-25. • The rise and many activities of this dynasty were prophesied in Daniel 11:4-35. • Parts of the Temple were destroyed and rebuilt about a half dozen times, but never completely destroyed until 70 AD. • A priest named Mattathias, and his five sons (nicknamed Maccabees) led the revolt against Antiochus. • The Temple was restored and rededicated in 164 BC, now celebrated as Hanukkah.
142-63 BC	Self rule under the Maccabees (Hasmoneans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For about 100 years the Maccabees slowly added portions of territory until the borders resembled those given to the tribes by Joshua. • There are four books of the Maccabees; the first of these is regarded as a reliable historical source; these books are included in the Apocrypha which includes 14 books (Esther and Ecclesiastes are among them). The first book of the Maccabees covers the accession of Antiochus (175 BC) to the death of Simon the Maccabee (135 BC). These books are valuable for historical purposes, but did not meet the criteria to be included in the canon of Scripture. • Priesthood was run by the government. • Pharisees, strict followers of Jewish law and customs, came to be during this time.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadducees also appeared and supported hellenization and the power of the priesthood. • The documents we call the Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden by a small group called the Essenes – these documents were found in 1947 AD, the year before Israel was declared a nation.
63 BC-125 AD	Roman (Herod the Great)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roman rule was prophesied in Daniel 2:40-44 and 7:7. • They made improvements to the Temple. • Herod the Great was king (honorary title) when Jesus was born.

Day 1, God Fulfills Prophecy Exactly as He Foretold

A comparison of the history of this 400-year period and Daniel 2, 7 and 11 would reveal to us that God’s prophetic words are fulfilled in time. It was true for the prophecies Noah received, the prophecies Abraham received, the prophecies Isaiah and Jeremiah received, the prophecies Daniel and Ezekiel received, the prophecies John (the writer of Revelation) received, and all the other prophets God blessed with the knowledge of future events.

Read Matthew 26:56; Luke 18:31, 21:22, 22:37, 24:44-49; Romans 9:28

1. What do these verses tell us about the fulfillment of Scripture?

2. How could Jesus have been comforted by knowing these difficult things happening to Him were to fulfill prophecy?

3. How can knowing what the Scripture says about future events be comforting to you? See Romans 15:4-6.

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4. Prophecy can be very hard to understand. How do we gain understanding? Check out Mark 4:24-25, Luke 24:25-31 and 45, Psalm 119:130, and 1 Chronicles 28:19.

5. Perhaps this 400-year era of Silent Years occurred because enough had already been said and it was time for God to bring about the things He said would happen. In the year that we live now, approximately how long has it been since we have received new Scriptural prophecy from God? _____. We have this in common with the people of that era—we live in a time when God is fulfilling Scripture instead of providing more Scripture. What other similarities do we have with them?

Silent Years	Today
God fulfilled prophecy but gave no new Scripture.	God is fulfilling prophecy but has given no new Scripture.
They were waiting for the promised Messiah.	We are waiting for
The land of Israel was surrounded by enemy nations.	The land of Israel is surrounded by
This was a time for the teachings of the Old Testament to penetrate the world.	This is a time for the teachings of
The world was being prepared for the Kingdom of God.	The world is being prepared for
Their children’s hearts needed turning to their fathers and their fathers’ hearts needed turning to their children.	Our children’s hearts need

Prayer focus: Isaiah 44:8 says, “Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none.” Remember to ask God for understanding of the things He has “announced” and “declared” in His Word. Confess any fears you have about the times we live in, and commit to trust that He is who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do.

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Day 2, All of God’s Word Speaks Continuously

A brief study on what God says in His Word and how He communicates will show us that these silent years—and our silent years—are, in fact, quite noisy!

6. What does God’s Word say about itself and its benefits?

Psalm 19:7-14	
Psalm 119:89	
Psalm 119:103	
Psalm 119:105	
Psalm 119:140	
Psalm 119:160	
Psalm 119:172	
Proverbs 30:5	
Isaiah 30:8	
Isaiah 55:10-11	
Hebrews 4:12	

7. What does Jesus say about Scripture?

Matthew 4:4	
Matthew 5:17-19	
Matthew 24:35	
Mark 12:24	
Luke 11:28	
Luke 16:17	
John 5:24	
John 5:46-47	
John 8:31-32	

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John 8:47	
John 10:35	
John 14:23	
John 15:7	
John 17:14,	
John 17:17	
Revelation 22:7	

8. Knowing this little bit about God’s Word, what word from God did the people have during the 400-years of silence? _____

I hope you figured out that all of the Old Testament was speaking to God’s people from the first time it was spoken and will continue to speak to all of us throughout all time. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Prayer focus: If you have a copy of God’s Word, you have a great treasure. Ask God how He would like you to make the most of it in your life?

Day 3, God’s Word Is God Speaking

Where there is a copy of the Scripture available, God is not silent.

9. Who provided the words for Scripture?

Deuteronomy 9:10	
2 Kings 17:37	
1 Chronicles 28:19	
Jeremiah 26:4	
2 Peter 1:19-21	
Revelation 19:9	

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10. Why was God’s Word written?

Exodus 24:12	
Deuteronomy 6:4-12	
Psalms 102:18	
John 20:30-31	
Acts 8:35	
Acts 18:28	
Romans 16:25-27	
1 Corinthians 10:11	
1 Timothy 3:15	
1 John 2:1	
1 John 5:13	
Revelation 22:10	

11. What happens to those who do not listen to God’s Word?

Proverbs 30:5-6	
Jeremiah 6:19	
Daniel 9:13	
1 Peter 2:8	

God has purposely provided His Word and diligently protected it through the years so that even when He is not sending man to declare His words to us, we can still hear from Him and know what He has to say.

Prayer focus: Spend some time telling God what His written Word means to you. If you’ve ignored His Word, it’s time to repent.

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Day 4, God’s Written Word Will ...

It’s possible that during the 400-years of silence the people felt like God was doing nothing for them; it’s possible we feel that way during our years of silence. If we aren’t reading and doing God’s Word, it is very likely that we feel God has left us in need. Hopefully, the Scriptures we read today will confirm for you that God speaks to us and works in our lives through His Word.

12. What will God’s Word do for you?

Joshua 1:8	
Joshua 23:6	
Psalms 119:9	
Psalms 119:25	
Psalms 119:28	
Psalms 119:38	
Psalms 119:49-50	
Psalms 119:58	
Psalms 119:16	
Psalms 119:162	
Psalms 119:169	
Psalms 119:170	
Psalms 130:5	
Jeremiah 15:16	
Jeremiah 23:28	
Luke 10:25-26	
Luke 24:32	
John 2:22	
Acts 17:2-3	
Romans 3:4	
Romans 10:17	
Philippians 3:1	

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1 Thessalonians 2:13	
1 Timothy 4:5-6	
1 Timothy 4:16	
2 Timothy 3:15-17	
Titus 1:9	
1 Peter 2:2	
Revelation 1:3	

13. Which one of these verses means the most to you now?

14. What story can you tell from your own experience that demonstrates the truth of at least one of these verses?

15. How will you praise God today for His written word?

Prayer focus: Tell God what reading these words of His has done for you today.

Day 5, Other Ways God Speaks

We are blessed to have God’s Word the Bible readily available to us, but what about those who don’t? Probably the vast majority of the people in the Time between the Testaments did not have a copy of the Scriptures, and certainly none of them had the New Testament. How did they hear from God? How else can we hear from God? God is able to speak to us even in times when we are not able to read the Bible, or get to church, or call a friend who knows the Bible!

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16. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-8. In addition to Scripture, how were the people then and now supposed to be hearing God’s words?

Wouldn’t our world be different if God’s people were diligently teaching God’s words to their children in their daily conversations!

17. Read Psalm 19:1-4a. What is speaking of God in these verses and what is it saying?

18. According to Romans 1:18-20, what do we understand about God through the way He created us and what He has created?

19. Clearly we are never to worship the creation, but the wonder of God’s creation should cause us to praise the Creator. Describe a time when you spontaneously praised God because of something He did in the heavens.

The followers of God living in the era of the Silent Years did not have the Holy Spirit living inside them, but believers do today,

20. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13. What do these verses tell us about the Holy Spirit and how we hear from God through the Holy Spirit?

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21. Describe a time when you heard a word from God through the Holy Spirit?

22. In addition to God’s Word, where else is God’s law written? See Jeremiah 31:33.

Praise God, He has never left us without His Word.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3). “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Prayer focus: Read 2 Peter 3:5-7. This would be a good day to step outside, look around you, and give thanks to the Father in heaven who created all that beauty and holds it together by His powerful word.