

The Right Time, The Right Place

To the weary, downtrodden and persecuted
Keep hold of your hope through the long dark night.
Dawn will soon break and restore your joy.

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Introduction

The new is in the old contained, the old is in the new explained¹

We cannot just simply move from the Old-Testament to the New without setting the scene of transition.

There are two golden rules for reading scripture. The first is to get as close to the mind of the writer as you can, the second to get as close to the understanding of the original reader as you can. In other words, it is about getting into the right time and the right place. Without these considerations you can guarantee to introduce error. The New-Testament fulfils what the Old-Testament predicted. It puts its seal of approval on all that was anticipated. The Old-Testament has made it clear that, although the promise was sufficient to save from the beginning of time, the means of salvation needed be implemented at a certain point of time in history. Confidence in, and compliance with God are all He needs to deliver Salvation from the time of Adam through to the final Judgement day. Anyone can receive salvation and eternal life by a life of faith and obedience to God the creator.² However:

when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.³

1 Augustine

2 pp 8-16 Surfing the Scriptures: Brian E.R. Limmer

3 Gal 4: 4

So, understanding events leading up to that moment in time, is essential for understanding the teachings Jesus gave, and why He taught them. Without that, we are bound to adapt these books into our time and our place.

The New-Testament focuses in on the means of salvation. It tells us, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, is the means by which all people might be saved. God never promised anything without providing the means of fulfilment. We may not like that means, we may not understand that means, but be sure, it will be the *only* means. The Old-Testament is a historical record of how God kept His promises safe. The New-Testament records show the means God chose to deliver those promises. Many have rejected God's means, and many have accepted it. Either way, the promise was sufficient to make salvation active from the time of Adam onward.

The Church can be misled by calling the gap between the Old-Testament and the New, '*four-hundred-years of silence*'. What that implies is, nothing much went on in those years that is relevant to our modern Bible. When the Puritans and Reformers cut the apocryphal books and the book of Maccabees from between its covers, we were forced to look either look outside of scripture, or assume nothing in that period was relevant to God's Plan. This in turn gave a green light to later individuals who would have happily cut James and Revelation from Scripture which, according to their opinion, was not up to standard.

When God is silent, He is waiting for time to catch up. God is not changing direction, God is compacting. He is laying down a cement base on which He will build the next step. When the Church arrives in the New-Testament, it comes complete with a canon of scripture recording the concrete foundation of its mission. But it also came with a bundle of other writings to expound or explain. The ‘*Apocryphal*’ books, Enoch, Baruch, Mishna, Talmud and other ‘Oral Laws’, were all part and parcel in the Synagogues and often read in place of the sermon, (though always in addition to scripture).

As we left the Old-Testament, Ezra and his team of seventy Priests were busy writing out these writings in preparation for when there would be no more national prophets to lead the way through those four hundred years. Instead, the baton must be handed over to priests, armed with the scriptures, and other writings to encourage the people until Messiah comes. Messiah would release the means by which everyone will have the scriptures written into their heart. Looking back, we can see that right on time, immediately before Messiah, another prophet like Elijah⁴ roamed the desert calling for repentance.

Daniel and the prophets had told us what God intended to do during the so called, ‘four-hundred-years of silence’. We make a mistake if we think that everything God does is written in our scriptures.

4 Named ‘John the Baptiser’ - Malachi 4: 6

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.⁵

We close the Old-Testament with seven outstanding events unfinished, These things must take place before the New-Testament can open. First, the relevant parts of Daniel and Ezekiel's prophecy must be fulfilled. Four conquering nations must come, each swallowing up the previous empire to enlarge it. Babylon and Assyria had come, Greece and Rome had yet to come.⁶ Second, The scriptures must be consolidated and canonized as the foundation. National prophets were about to hand over the baton to Priests for a time; There was to be no more national prophesy, until one like Elijah would announce the Messiah.⁷ Third, the promised seed line must hand over the baton safely to one who could combine the role of Prophet, Priest and King, *'after the example of Melchizedek'*.

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool. The LORD shall send the sceptre of your authority out from Zion: rule in the midst of your enemies until the people own your power. In the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning you have the dew of youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

5 John 21: 25

6 See Daniel Chapter 2 & Surfing the Scripture Chapters 21 & 22.

7 See the book of Zechariah & Surfing the Scripture Chapter 26.

Fourth, Judaism must refocus away from the central temple worship, to form congregational groups. The Temple is to be destroyed after the '*abomination of desolation*', and synagogue congregations around the world must be ready to transform into church. Church is going to spread like wildfire and will need synagogue bases ready to receive the fire and pass it on. This process had already begun when they were carried away to Babylon, where they formed congregations up and down the land. We will return to this in a minute.

Fifth, for the gospel to spread to the whole world, geographically the world must have road networks to carry it. This part of the pre-planning of God will be carried out by the Greeks and consolidated by the Romans. Sixth, the people need to be one tongue. Pentecost was an exceptional sign that the Gospel will be world-wide. While the gift of tongues is still present in the Church, it is rarely⁸ reported that evangelists speak to peoples of all tongues without an interpreter. Even Paul needed Mark to interpret for him in Rome. Greek and Aramaic were to become the common languages of the known world, and the language in which most people received the gospel. Seventh, but by no means the final point, the political climate needed to be right. Leaders must be both tolerant at times, and hostile enough to drive the Church further round the world at other times.

What happened in that four-hundred-years was a seismic shift in world culture. But because it is not recorded in

8 Rare but not extinct

scripture it is often ignored by Christians. As a consequence, Church had and has become a hotbed of '*Good News Plus*'. Not only teachings of Paul but also teachings of Jesus are interpreted without understanding why, where or when they were taught. Like the Judaizers of old, rules and regulations are added to the gospel without rhyme or reason. For that reason the introduction of this book will be longer. But it will considerably shorten the time needed to explain verses in chapters following. That is because the background is common to most of the world at that time, and the passages will become self-explanatory.

God deals with nations. God chose Israel to deliver the seed line from Adam to Messiah, and also to demonstrate God's '*Kingdom ways*' to the world. Four other empires, prophesied by Daniel, Ezekiel, (and others), were also allowed (or chosen⁹), to rise and conquer. Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, were all part of the preparation for Messiah's coming. Each of the four nations shaped the world ready for one who will be Prophet, Priest and King. The New-Testament writers had to deal with many false ideas that had crept into the Church, almost as soon as it is born. Most are still around to this day. So, to avoid repeating them in each book or letter, we will deal with them here and refer back to them as we meet them later.

9 According to your theology

Historically:

Geographically, Palestine was the centre of God's activity. God called Abraham out of Babylon and placed his descendants slap bang in the middle of three continents. Consequently, whenever one land had a disagreement with another they would invariably have to fight over the top of this little bridge point called Palestine where they lived.

We left the Old-Testament with the Persians as top nation. Daniel prophesied the Greeks would rise next, to conquer Persia and become the next superpower. They duly emerged to rule from three-thirty-one^{BC} to three-twenty-three^{BC}. A triangle of three small states, Macedon, Thrace and Sparta¹⁰, were being starved of water by surrounding nations. Philip of Macedon made some deals with the crushing nations to take over the region. He quickly grew his army and conquered the surrounding nations. But he died young.

His son Alexander-the-Great took up the mantle to conquer all the lands from Macedonia to India. Alexander's new elephant-tank corps required new direct roads which they cut through the surrounding lands. Later the Romans upgraded them and took the credit as great road builders. On his way to Egypt, Alexander marched toward Palestine. Josephus records that the high priest, named Juddua, rode out to meet him and showed him the prophecy of Daniel. Whereupon Alexander, recognizing himself in the prophecy, favoured the Jews with a puppet priest rather than destroying them. He then passed through their land to conquer Egypt. This

¹⁰ Where Spartacus came from

allowed Israel leeway to keep their laws and worship God for a while longer. Juddua befriended Alexander-the-Great and secured exemption from paying the tribute.

When Alexander built the great city of Alexandria, he invited at least seventy Jewish scholars to live there in his newly built university. The Jews continued in good favour under the next Polytomy General. Ptolemy II or Philadelphus ordered the Septuagint¹¹ translation of Hebrew Scripture. This translation of the Old-Testament into Greek shows the strong Hellenisation that had occurred to Hebrew people who, up to now, would not write in anything but Hebrew.

When Alexander-the-Great was dying, His generals asked him who would inherit the Empire. Alexander was reported to have replied ‘ *The strongest* ’! Five of his generals each grabbed a part of the empire and started to fight among themselves for supremacy. This quickly turned to four as the weakest link was ousted. Cassander took Northern Turkey, Lysimachus took the Southern borders of Russia and Ukraine, Ptolemy took Egypt and Seleucus took Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan¹². The struggle for power between Polytomy and Seleucus with Palestine in the middle caused a permanent change in the politics and religious hierarchy of Palestine. In two-hundred-and-fifteen ^{BC}, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), became king of the Seleucid

11 The Septuagint or XII Version named after the seventy scholars who translated it and also the initial ‘Mishna’ or rabbinic law and The Talmud - Rabin commentaries.

12 See Figure 4 Heliopolis the city

region.¹³ He was certainly not favourable toward the Jews – nor indeed to anyone.

The translation of the Scriptures into Greek began a civil war back in Palestine, the people divided between ‘*progressives*’, who formed the Sadducees, and ‘*Conservatives*’, who became the Pharisees. Epiphanes appointed a compliant Sadducee priest to the priesthood for the purpose of promoting worship of Hercules. When the people rebelled against that, Epiphanes sent general Antiochus to sort them out, but he made things worse by desecrating the temple. He took the treasures from it and erected a statue to Jupiter where the altar once stood. He also burned some scripture and forced Jews to eat pork. All this led to the people looking for a champion which they found in the Maccabees.

You may have heard of the Hasmonean dynasty, these were the Maccabees. In a tiny town of Modi'in, A priest of this period named Mattathias, when told by Antiochus to offer a pig on the altar of the temple, refused. But another priest, sucking up to the Greeks, offered to do so. Mattathias killed that priest and when the Greeks tried again to enforce the order, Mattathias killed some of them also. Then he took his sons John, Simeon and Judas into the desert from where they carried out Guerrilla warfare on the Greeks. Judas Maccabee, (God's Hammer), successfully recaptured the temple from the Greeks, with a handful of men, (despite the large Greek armies). He lit the lamp in the temple which

¹³ His name means -above manifestation and claimed to be a manifestation from the gods above (Platonism).

was to never supposed to go out¹⁴. There was only enough kosher oil for one day but the lamp stayed alight for eight days until they could produce some more kosher oil. This is the origin of the Jewish Hanukkah celebrations to this day — The festival of light.

John Hyrcanus was a son of Simon Maccabee. He fused the Hebrew civil and the religious authorities together. Combining civil and priestly authority was a no, no under Mosaic law until Messiah should come. This evolved into the Sanhedrin, a council of priests with civil authority, the very authority that tried Jesus later. Thus began a dynasty, which saw human beings, trying to establish the kingdom by force rather than being patient for God to establish it under Messiah. ‘Palm-Sunday’ would not have been without this change in culture. God had already quietly taken care of the true kingly line. This was to come via David and Zerubbabel, but it had not been noticed during this four-hundred-year period. As so often happens when people do not see what God is doing, the new Jewish leadership attempted to fulfil the scriptures with a human solution.

But, when the full and right time came, God sent his Son, who was born from a woman and lived under the law. God did this so that he could buy the freedom of those who were under the law. God's purpose was to make us his children.¹⁵

14 See Ex 27: 20-21 & Exodus 30: 8 ‘he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout all your generations.

15 Galatians 4: 4

All of this is important to this silent period because it is setting the scene for the coming Messiah. How can Jesus now recruit the '*sons of Thunder*' onto his team, and still proclaim a mission of peace?

All this absorption of Greek culture was preparing the way both for and against the Church. Up until now there had been no Israel without the temple. The word of God came down through the High Priest until, while in Babylon, the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, and they assembled outside until they could build synagogues. This time, under the Greeks, Hebrews had become accustomed to the idea of synagogues rather than Temple. Some had even offered, of their own free will, to go to Alexandria to translate the scriptures in order that the scripture could be spread into the synagogues. Meantime synagogues revived and spread. This separated the two priestly groups even further. Sadducees embraced the changes and centred it around the plans for a new Roman temple, Pharisees, having their nose put out of joint when the Romans gave Sadducees oversight of the temple, reluctantly turned to this new phenomenon of synagogue to maintain their influence. So when Rome finally conquered the Greek empire, Sadducees had compromised with Rome to receive custody of the new Temple. Pharisees hung on to their prestige by taking over the responsibilities of synagogues.

When '*Jesus-Jews*' spread to these Synagogues after the resurrection, Pharisees tried to keep '*old-time-religion*' alive

by aggressively opposing their new freedom. Thus began the sect known as '*Judaizers*'. The early church assemblies would have to combat these. Pharisees never started Synagogues because they were against them in principle. But as soon as one was formed, they moved in on it. Their theology was, '*You only have part of the gospel. To be real Christians, you must return to the Jewish law, males must be circumcised, and all must keep the ceremonial institutions laid down by Moses*'. We will see Paul, John and Peter angrily battled this out in their letters. But for the grace of God, Paul himself might have been one of these Judaizers.

Philosophy and Religion:

It is said every living religion today can be found in early Babylon. When Abraham left Ur in Babylon, having rejected all their '*ambitious and scheming gods*' in favour of '*The one creator and sustainer God- Yahweh*', God chose him to bless him, and he would become the seed, through which God would save the world. From that point on Christians, focused only on this one account we call the scriptures. But all the other philosophies of Babylon did not go away, they simply spread unseen throughout the world via other routes, and through other nations. We see them in the Old-Testament weaving in and out of conflicts with Israel, so we know they are there. Likewise, Israel was not the only nation with the truth. Melchizedek did not descend from Abraham, nor did many others: Jethro, Balaam, Caleb, Job, Gibeonites, Othniel, Shamgar, Jael, Ruth, Obed-Edom, Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba, Queen of Sheba, Widow of

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