

Finishing Well

Lesson #26

Spiritual Warfare in the Silent Years

July 5, 2023

For 4,000 years the Jewish people have faced relentless persecution, opposition, and attempts to annihilate and destroy them. In the future, the struggle against Israel continues. If it concerned any other people, this campaign would seem totally irrational and insane. However, with Israel, a rational but very Satanic strategy sustains this animosity. The attempts to completely destroy Israel will always fail. The persecutors of Israel will come and go, but the persecution will remain until the second coming of Christ.

The 400 years of silence refers to the time between the Old Testament and New Testaments, during which God did not speak to the Jewish people through a prophetic word.

They are important because they lasted longer than the Kingdom of Judah.

- Examine the political events and how God used pagan rulers in the ancient world to bring glory to Himself.
- Examine how God sovereignly used this period to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.
- This period changed the entire stage for the Gospel. It began with the warning:

Mal. 4:5-6 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

It ended with the coming of John the Baptist, the Messiah's forerunner.

At the time of Malachi's warning, about 430 B.C., the Jews had returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity [as merchants, not shepherds]. They were a puppet nation under the domination of the great world power of that day, The Medo-Persian Empire.

In Jerusalem, the temple had been restored. Both the Law and the priesthood of Aaron's line had been restored, and the Jews had given up their worship of idols.

Nevertheless, Malachi's warning was not without cause.

- The priesthood had become compromised with the things of the world.
- The Jewish people were mistreating their wives, marrying pagans and not tithing.
- The priests were neglecting the temple and not teaching the people the ways of God.

Consider: God used the silent years to prepare the perfect time and place for Jesus' arrival. God always planned that Jesus would die on a Roman cross to pay the penalty for the sin of mankind. This plan was not set in motion at the birth of Jesus, but during the 400 silent years. In the book of Matthew, you discover an entirely different atmosphere -- almost a different world. During this time, God rearranged the scenes of history, much as a stage crew will rearrange the stage sets after the curtain has fallen, and when the curtain rises again there is an entirely new setting. The Roman legions have spread throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. Rome is now the dominant power of the earth.

The Jews were under a vice king, Herod the Great, a descendant of Esau instead of Jacob. Furthermore, the high priests who now sit in the seat of religious authority in the nation are no longer from the line of Aaron.

➤ Rather, they are hired priests to whom the office is sold as political patronage. The temple is still the center of Jewish worship, but the synagogues that have sprung up in every Jewish city seem to be the center of Jewish life even more than the temple. Priests continue to provide leadership, but the people look to a new array of religious authorities as well. These include Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. A governing body, the council or Sanhedrin, sits over these as a religious Supreme Court.

History In Advance: God used a dream to communicate with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Dan. 2:19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. God provided an image which illustrated an overview of world events in the millennia yet to come.

This image depicted what Jesus called "the times of the Gentiles."

Defined as: Long period of time from the Babylonian Empire to the 2nd Coming Of the Messiah. The Gentiles have dominance over the City of Jerusalem.

Note: Between the Roman Empire and the 10 toes of iron & clay, insert the 7 churches of Revelation. [Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia & Laodicea.]

When the Church is complete, Jesus will rapture the church out of this world.

Then the antichrist will make the covenant to begin the 7 year tribulation period.

Luke 21:24 Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. The "times of the Gentiles" will end when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. [Luke 21:25-28]

Note: Dan. 2 = Nebuchadnezzar sees from man's perspective: human progress; bright, shiny
Dan. 7 = God's view: voracious beasts; diversity > The Times Of The Gentiles

1. Head of Gold = Nebuchadnezzar = Then > Current major world power [636 BC-539 BC]

Dan. 7:4 The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

Consider: Is this an illusion to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was saved?

2. Chest and arms of Silver = Medo-Persian Empire [539 BC - 330 BC]

Dan. 7:5 And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, [Persia was dominant] and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh.

Note: 3 ribs = Babylon, Egypt & Lydia were defeated to establish the Persian Empire

Jewish Life Under Persian Rule:

- a. Pro-Israel policy: People who hindered the Israelites from rebuilding their Temple and resettling their land were threatened with capital punishment. [Ezra 6]
- b. Jews began to worship in local synagogues. Priests served in the Temple and offered required sacrifices. Worship in the synagogue focused on the study of the Law. Scribes became the influential preservers and interpreters of the Law.
- c. Religious conflict with the Samaritans who had intermarried with other groups during the exile. Worship became syncretistic, incorporating elements of paganism with true worship.
- d. Samaritans built a rival temple in the north on Mt. Gerazim.

3. Belly & Thighs of Brass = Grecian Empire = Alexander The Great [330 BC - 63 BC]

Dan. 7:6 After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.

Daniel has another vision in chapter 8 which is: 2 years after his vision of Daniel 7 and 12 years before Belshazzar's feast.

The vision in Dan.8 is of The Ram and the He-goat & focuses on the Persian & Greek Empires.

- The Bear with 3 ribs = Persian Empire = The Ram with 2 horns; 1 higher than the other
- The 4 headed leopard = Greek Empire = The Goat with the notable horn between eyes

Dan. 8:3-4 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

⁴ I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will and became great.

Dan. 8:5 And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes.

Dan. 8:6-7 And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power. And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with rage against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand.

In 330 B.C. a tremendous battle between the Persians and the Greeks entirely altered the course of history. Alexander, as a young man only 20 years old, led the armies of Greece in victory over the Persians and completely demolished the power of Persia. The center of world power then shifted farther west into Greece, and the Grecian empire was born.

During the reign of Alexander the Great the whole world changed and became "Grecianized" or Hellenized [a system of ease and please]. Grecian Influence Was Very Strong In Israel, especially the priesthood in Israel which became corrupt and power mad.

Note: A party arose among the Jews called the Hellenists who were eager to bring Grecian culture and thought into the nation and liberalize some of the Jewish laws.

Acts 6:1 Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. [problem in New Testament]

Result: Split into 2 major parties

1. Strong Hebrew nationalist who wanted to preserve everything according to Mosaic order.
 - a. Resisted all foreign influence to disrupt the old Jewish ways.
 - b. Became known as the PHARISEES ["to separate"] - insisted on preserving traditions.
 - c. Grew stronger, became more legalistic and rigid in their requirements until they became the target for some of the most scorching words of Jesus.
 - d. Became religious hypocrites - kept the outward form of the law but violated its spirit.
2. Hellenists became more influential in the politics.
 - a. Became known in NT days as the SADDUCEES or the liberals.
 - b. Turned away from strict interpretation of the law.
 - c. God should not have any part in governing the nation.
 - d. Rationalists who ceased to believe in the supernatural in any form.
 - e. Did not believe in a resurrection.

Note: The Pharisees & Sadducees are the main antagonists in the New Testament.

They hated each other, but they found a common enemy in Jesus.

Alexander's Conquests accomplished God's purposes in the world and helped to prepare the world for the coming of Christ and the spread of the gospel.

1. He put an end to the Oriental influence that threatened to take over the Western world.
2. He helped bring peoples together by extending Greek culture and language.
 - For the Jewish people, who were to be set apart, the coming of Greek culture represented a moral and spiritual crisis.
3. His policy of kindness toward conquered people introduced a powerful example of brotherhood into the world.
4. He literally "wedded East to West" when 9000 of his soldiers and officers married Eastern women in one mass wedding.

Dan. 8:8 Therefore the He Goat Waxed Very Great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.

Alexander died in 323 B.C. when he was about 32 years old. He had drunk himself to death in the prime of his life, grieved because he had no more worlds to conquer.

He left no successor or heir. His kingdom fell into disarray.

Cassander Greece & Macedonia

Lysimachus Thrace & Bithynia = Asia Minor

Seleucus Syria, Babylonia

Ptolemy Egypt, Israel, Arabia

During this time Israel was annexed by Egypt and suffered greatly at the hands of Ptolemy. In fact, for the next one hundred years, Israel was caught in the meat-grinder of the unending conflicts between Syria on the north and Egypt on the south.

1. Thousands of Jews were forcibly resettled in Alexandria. They began to speak Greek.

Their worship came to reflect a Greek preference for aesthetics over content.

2. In Egypt, the OT was translated into Greek. [Septuagint; ~284 BC] It came into widespread use and is frequently quoted in the New Testament.

3. The NT was written in Greek.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, who spoke Latin, he still wrote in Greek.

Dan. 8:9-10 And Out Of One Of Them Came Forth A LITTLE HORN, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.

¹⁰ And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground and Stamped Upon Them.

Dan. 8:23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

➤ He came to power in the last 7 years before the demise of the Grecian Empire.

Josephus: And indeed it so came to pass that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel's vision. And what he wrote years before, they came to pass. No prophecy was ever more accurately fulfilled than this. [Antiquities of the Jews]

This "little horn" is Antiochus IV, the 8th king of the Syrian [Seleucid] Dynasty.

He was a vicious and violent persecutor of the Jews. He is often referred to as:

➤ The Antichrist of the OT since he fulfilled some of Daniel's predictions concerning the coming of one who would be "a contemptible person" and a "vile king."

He called himself, "the Illustrious One." The Jews called him, "the Madman."

Dan. 8:11-12 Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of the sanctuary was cast down.

And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practiced, and prospered.

198 BC: Syrian [Seleucids] section overthrew the Egyptian section.

175 BC: Antiochus Epiphanes = King of Syria = 1st time:

Israel came under a ruler who tried to stamp out Judaism completely. They were BRUTAL!

171 BC: Antiochus invaded Egypt and once again Israel was caught in the nutcracker of rivalry. Israel is the most fought-over country in the world, and Jerusalem is the most captured city in all history. It has been pillaged, ravished, burned and destroyed more than 27x in its history.

169 BC: Antiochus made another attempt to attack Egypt but was rebuffed.

After leaving Egypt, he took out his rage again on Israel.

He sent his army, under the leadership of General Apollonius, and once again Jerusalem became a ruin. The walls were broken down and the city was burned.

The people were slaughtered by the thousands. The women and children were taken captive. Then Antiochus demanded all the people to worship his god. He made the temple a place of worship for Jupiter Olympus. His rage against the people knew no end.

Mothers who circumcised their boys were thrown from the city walls along with their children. Those who observed the sabbath were burned alive.

A woman, and her seven sons were taken before the king, where they were demanded to abandon their faith and serve Antiochus's god. When she refused, her eldest son was taken, whereupon his tongue was torn out, his members cut off, and he was burned alive for his refusal to serve the king's heathen god. The woman was forced to watch as her other six sons, in like manner, were killed. She was the last to die.

1. His first act was to dispose the high priest in Jerusalem. He replaced him with a "Hellenizer" who started turning Jerusalem into a Greek city. [168 B.C. I Macc. 1:41ff]

2. Under his reign, Jerusalem and all the Jews' Religious Rites Began To Deteriorate as they came fully under the power of the Syrian king.

He sent letters to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. [I Maccabees 1:44-49]

1. Follow customs strange to the land
2. Forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary
3. Directed the Jews to profane Sabbaths and feasts
4. Directed Jews to defile the sanctuary and the priests
5. Directed them to build altars in sacred precincts and shrines for idols
6. Sacrifice swine and unclean animals
7. Leave your sons uncircumcised
8. Forget Jewish law and change all your ordinances
9. Whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.
10. He set an altar to Zeus bearing the feature of Antiochus himself on the altar of burnt offerings within the temple court. [Macc. 1:54]

Jews' Response:

1. Some tried to cooperate with his demands = Hellenists.
2. Resisted = Hasidim, pious ones, who were the forerunner of the Pharisees.
3. Loyal to High Priests = forerunners to the Sadducees

Events:

1. While Antiochus was in Egypt, it was REPORTED he had been KILLED in battle.
2. Jerusalem rejoiced!

The people organized a revolt and overthrew Menelaus, the pseudo-priest.

3. When the report reached Antiochus (very much alive in Egypt) that Jerusalem was delighted at the report of his death, he organized his armies and swept like a fury back across the land, falling upon Jerusalem with terrible vengeance.

4. He overturned the city, regained his power, and guided by the treacherous Menelaus, intruded into the very Holy of Holies in the TEMPLE itself.
5. Some 40,000 people were slain in 3 days of fighting during this terrible time.
6. When he forced his way into the Holy of Holies, he destroyed the scrolls of the law.
7. To the absolute horror of the Jews, he took a sow and offered it upon the sacred altar.
8. Then with a broth made from the flesh of this unclean animal, he sprinkled everything in the temple, thus completely defiling and violating the sanctuary. [~171 BC]
9. It was this act of defiling the temple which is referred to by the Lord Jesus as the "Abomination Of Desolation" which Daniel had predicted.
Matt. 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, ...
10. The "Abomination Of Desolation" is also a future sign of the coming desolation of the temple when the Antichrist himself will enter the temple, call himself God and defile the temple during the Tribulation Period. He will demand worship and kill those who refuse to worship him.

The characteristics and career of Antiochus parallel those of Antichrist.

- Both begin modestly but increase in power and influence.
- Both blaspheme God with mouths that speak great things.
- Both persecute the Jewish people.
- Both claim to be gods and put images in the temple.
- Both impose their own religion on the people.
- Both are opposed by a believing remnant that knows God.
- Both are energized by the devil and are great deceivers.
- Both appear to succeed marvelously and seem to be invincible.
- Both are finally defeated by the coming of a redeemer. Judas Maccabeus & Jesus Christ

The Temple was cleansed under the leadership of a man now famous in Jewish history, Judas Maccabeus, "The Hammer." He was of the Aaronic priestly line who with his father and 4 brothers, rose up in revolt against the Syrian king.

1. His father, Mattathias, an elderly priest, refused to offer a required pagan sacrifice to Zeus.
 - However, a reprobate Jew volunteered to offer the sacrifice.
 - Mattathias killed the Jew and the Syrian officer.
 - He fled to the hills and called faithful Jews to join him in rebellion. [167 BC]
2. They captured the attention of the Israelites, summoned them to follow them into battle, and in a series of pitched battles in which they were always an overwhelming minority, overthrew the power of the Syrian kings, captured Jerusalem, and cleansed the temple. [165]
 - Removed evidence of pagan worship, erected a new altar to God & ground to dust the statue of Zeus-Antiochus

Dan. 8:13b-14 Daniel had predicted the sanctuary would be polluted for 2300 days.

How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the offense causes horror, so as to allow both the sanctuary and the army to be trampled?" ¹⁴ And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be properly restored."

- In exact accordance with his prophecy, it was exactly 2300 days [6 ½ years] before the temple was cleansed.

3. The day they cleansed the temple was named the Day of Dedication, and it occurred on the 25th day of December. Jews still celebrate the Feast of Dedication on that date each year.

4. Festival of Lights or the Festival of HANUKKAH (Dedication)

The Maccabees, of the Hasmonean family, began a line of high priests known as:

- the Hasmonean Dynasty.

Their sons, for the next 3 or 4 generations, ruled as priest in Jerusalem. [165 BC- 63 BC]

- They continually had to defend themselves against the constant assaults of the Syrian army who tried to recapture the city and the temple.

Political dynasty of the Maccabees [Hasmonean] was short-lived and disastrous. As they assumed the throne and the office of high priest, the nation became beset by infighting.

D.S. Russell: "We see the emergence of an independent Jewish state in which the civil head and the military leader were at the same time the High Priest."

- Simon was murdered by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, and his son John Hyrcanus, became the High Priest. [135-104 BC]
 - ❖ He reached an accord with Syria by which the Hellenists became loyal citizens of the Jewish community.
- 1. The ideals of the Hellenist party were perpetuated in the party of the Sadducees. Sadducees supported Hasmonean rulers as kings and priests.
- 2. The Hasidim were perpetuated in the part of the Pharisees who insisted a true king could only be a descendant of David; a priest could only be a descendant of Aaron. Dominant Party in Israel; intolerant of all who disagreed with them.

Note: The parties are mentioned for the 1st time during the reign of John Hyrcanus.

Russell: Independence was gained in 129 BC and confirmed by the Roman Senate.

Hyrcanus began to extend his territory.

In the south, he seized Idumea, compelling the inhabitants to be circumcised.

In the north he seized Samaritan territory, destroying the rival Temple on Mount Gerizim.

Charles Pfeiffer: There is something ironical in the thought of a grandson of Mattathias forcing religious conformity on a people conquered by Jewish arms! Many historical parallels may be drawn. The oppressed frequently become the oppressors.

- The Hasmoneans took over the High Priesthood and it became increasingly worldly and irreligious.

Successive Hasmonean rulers became very unpopular.

Alexander Jannaeus [103-79 BC] He continued the policy of territorial expansion.

Pfeiffer: "The size of the Jewish state was comparable to that of the glorious days of David & Solomon."

He enraged the people and was pelted by the Jews when he poured water from the Pool Siloam on the ground instead of on the altar at the Feast of Tabernacles.

He responded by massacring 6,000 Jews. Insurrection broke out and left 50,000 people dead. To crush the rebellious spirit, Alexander began to practice crucifying and mutilating the people. He crucified 800 Pharisees who watched their wives and children die as they were being crucified. Alexander was drinking and carousing with concubines.

As the country grew more unstable, Israelite factions turned to mercenaries and outside nations for support.

- During this time, one of the HASMONEAN priests made a league with the rising power in the West, Rome. He signed a treaty with the Senate of Rome, providing for help in the event of Syrian attack. Though the treaty was made in all earnestness and sincerity, it was this pact which introduced Rome into the picture and history of Israel.

As the battles between the two opposing forces waged hotter and hotter, Rome was watchful.

Finally, the Governor of Idumea, a man named Antipater and a descendant of Esau, made a pact with two other neighboring kings and attacked Jerusalem to try to overthrow the authority of the Hasmonean high priest. The battle raged so fiercely that finally Pompey, the Roman general, who happened to have an army in Damascus at the time, was besought by both parties to come and intervene. One side had a little more money than the other, and persuaded by that logical argument, Pompey came down from Damascus, entered the city of Jerusalem-again with terrible slaughter, walked into the Holy of Holies, overthrew the city and captured it for Rome.

- In 63 B.C., Pompey installed Hyrcanus II as the High Priest.
- In 63 B.C. Israel was under the authority and power of Rome.

World Empires: Rome: Judea under Rome

63 BC Pompey occupies Jerusalem.

47 BC Pompey murdered during conquest of Egypt.

- Antipater, Herod the Great's father, assisted Rome's conquest of Egypt.
- Julius Caesar made Antipater Procurator of Judea in return.

44 BC Julius Caesar murdered by Brutus. Empire is ruled by Octavius & Marc Anthony

31 BC Octavius defeats Brutus & Antony

- Claims for himself the title Augustus.
- We are now in "New Testament" times.

Two types of provinces:

- Imperial: frontier areas needing strong army to keep people in line
Ruled by Procurators selected by the Emperor.
- Senatorial Basically peaceful areas which are ruled by Proconsuls appointed annually by the Senate

7. In 47 BC, Caesar and the Roman Senate appointed Antipater [descendant of Esau] as the Procurator of Judea. He in turn appointed his two sons as kings of Galilee and Judea.

The son who became king of Judea is known to us as Herod the Great.

8. Jesus Christ will be born under his rule.

Gal. 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.