



SERMON NOTES

US N°. 167

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Title: 400 Years of "Silence"

1. The Curtain falls upon a distant, disobedient and dwindling chosen people.
 - a. The prophet Malachi (c. 435BC) was most likely a contemporary of Nehemiah, writing in regard to the sins that the exiles had once again fallen into after the construction of the Second Temple and the reconstruction of the walls around Jerusalem.
 - i. Mal. 1:6, *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'"*
 - ii. Mal. 3:1, *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts." (cf. Mt. 11:10)*
 - iii. Mal. 3:13-18, *"Your words have been harsh against Me," says the LORD, yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.'" Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him."*
 - iv. Mal. 4:1-6, *"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts. "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."*
 - b. Setting the back story with a quick review of the rise & fall of the people's obedience to the Lord ending with the Second Temple, rise of Torah observance, Synagogues, etc.
 - c. There is no recorded, authorized Word of the Lord until the birth of the Christ.

2. Scene changes

- a. Daniel's influence in Persia; Daniel placed as head of the Magi which was a hereditary Median priesthood, and resulted in repercussions which led to the plots involving the ordeal of the lion's den. (*cf. Dan. 2:48*)
- b. Greek victory over Persia by Alexander the Great around 330BC, eventually expands his empire as far as India. Alexander sets "*Koine Greek*" as the standard language of his empire, giving a unifying language.
 - i. The translation of the Septuagint in 284BC (the NT often quotes the Septuagint as opposed to the Hebrew OT).
- c. Upon his death, four key generals of Alexander divide his empire; Ptolemy and Seleucus took Egypt and Syria respectively. There was a lot of fighting between the two with Palestine in between. Jerusalem has been pillaged, ravaged, burned and destroyed more than 27 times in history.
- d. Reactionary creation of three Jewish political parties: the Greek party, Sadducees, the separatists, Pharisees, and the ascetic, communal party the Essenes. (Similar to the division within the Church today, Jesus offers another path unique to Him alone.)
 - i. Dead Sea scrolls found from 1946-1956, written around 350BC; have confirmed that the scriptures we hold today (2400 years later) are nearly exactly what was originally written.
- e. Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes desecrates the Temple, giving rise to the Maccabees (descendants of the true priestly line). Judas Maccabeus fights successful, underdog battles against Epiphanes, recaptures the Temple and subsequently re-dedicates it; re-lighting the menorah with only one day's worth of oil (sealed by previous High Priest) which lasted 8 days.
 - i. Festival of lights; *Jn. 10:22-39*, "...How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly... *I and My Father are one.*"
- f. Meanwhile, since the days of Daniel, the fortunes of both the Persian and the Jewish nation had been closely intertwined. Both nations had, in their turn, fallen under Seleucid domination in the wake of Alexander's conquests. Subsequently, both had regained their independence: the Jews under Maccabean leadership and the Persians as the dominating ruling group within the Parthian Empire. It was at this time that the Magi, in their dual priestly and governmental office, composed the upper house of the Council of the Megistanes (from which we get the term "magistrates"), whose duties included the absolute choice and election of the king of the realm. From Parthian history it's clear that whenever the Megistanes made a journey, they were accompanied by 1,000 mounted cavalry. It was them, therefore, who entered Jerusalem in the latter days of the reign of Herod. Herod's reaction was understandably one of fear when one considers the background of Roman-Parthian rivalry that prevailed during his lifetime.
 - i. Roman-Parthian Wars from 92BC – 629AD.
- g. One of the Hasmonean priests, descendants of the Maccabees, signed a treaty with Rome in the event of a Syrian attack. In 63BC the Roman General Pompey entered and burned Jerusalem; one of the sons of Antipater, Herod, became King of Judea.

- h. Pax Romana: 53,000 miles of roads (all leading to Rome), safe travels at 25 miles a day, and great access to the entire kingdom.
 - i. Census of Quirinius: Judas of Galilee or Judas of Gamala led a violent resistance to the census imposed for Roman tax purposes by Quirinius in Iudaea Province around 6 AD. The revolt was crushed brutally by the Romans. The leaders of the uprising claimed that the census and taxation associated with it were tantamount to slavery.
 - i. Josephus records that the Jews were being taxed by the Romans with commands coming from Syria as early as 44 BC. And the task of raising the funds fell upon the Jewish rulers in power at the time. For example Josephus records: "*Cassius rode into Syria in order to take command of the army stationed there, and on the Jews he placed a tax of 700 silver talents. Antipater gave the job of collecting this tax to his sons . . .*" (Jewish Antiquities XIV 271).
3. The Curtain rises upon a new day, a new hope for all nations. Gal. 4:4, "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law...*"
- a. The actors
 - i. The old man and woman; dead hopes become a live child.
 - ii. The young man and girl; unflinching faith in the face of shame.
 - iii. The Shepherds; dropping it all to follow the call
 - iv. Promises kept to Simeon & Anna;
 - v. The Magi; the sudden appearance of the Magi, a group of Persian-Parthian "*king makers*," who were most likely traveling in force with all imaginable oriental pomp and accompanied by an adequate cavalry escort to insure their safe penetration of Roman territory; this certainly alarmed Herod and the populace of Jerusalem.
 - 1. Mt. 2:1-13, "*...wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*"
 - 2. The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were prophetic, speaking of our Lord's offices of king, priest, and savior. Gold speaks of His kingship; frankincense was a spice used in the priestly duties; and myrrh was an embalming ointment anticipating His death.
 - b. Murder of the Innocents
 - i. Mt. 2:12-16
 - ii. Rev. 12:1-5
 - c. Fulfillment of prophecy: Micah prophecy 700 years earlier foretold His birth in Bethlehem. 350 prophecies fulfilled; 29 in a single day.
4. Takeaways.
- a. God knows all things and is in sovereign control. Pr. 21:1, "*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*" So when we watch the news, we need to remember that God is still orchestrating in all things.
 - i. God shaped the history of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and yes, even the US.

- b. In the midst of news events, He also knows His people and feels their pain.
- c. God's silence is not His absence, that's Him setting a new stage for a new act in the great cosmological drama unfolding before us.
 - i. Jos. 1:9, *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*
 - ii. Is. 43:1-7, *"...thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth – Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.'"*
 - iii. Mt. 28:20, *"...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
- d. So in the midst of everything going, do not forget...
 - i. The Lord, He is God, and He is sovereign to perfect His work.
 - ii. God perfectly set the stage so that the Good News would go to all the world.
 - iii. Let's choose to see Jesus for who He really is.
 - iv. Silence does not equate absence
 - v. Even today, through the *Headlines* and the *Heartache*, God is working out salvation for the nations – and for us.
 - vi. Faith: the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.