Period of Silence

Central Truth

There was a silence of 400 years between the Old Testament history and the New Testament history. In all periods God has kept a remnant for Himself. Cultures, systems and rulers may dramatically change, but God stays the same.

Introduction

We have already studied how the Jewish captives returned from Babylon to their own land in three groups. Here two important things must be considered.

1) The captives returned in three groups led by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. They came and re-built the Temple, city and the fortifications. They also restored worship services. These things are explained in the O.T. History books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther etc. The remainder of the history recorded in the Bible does not exceed that of 100 years. (B.C.536-432). Ezra 1:1-4.

2) During the '400 years' period between Malachi and the beginning of the New Testament, there were neither prophets nor inspired writers. Hence this period is called the Period of silence.

Historical Events

During the period between Malachi and Jesus Christ, there are some historical facts of paramount importance.

The Empire of Babylon ended with the king Beltshazzar. The king Beltshazzar in his pride did what seemed good to him. He defiled the holy vessels of the Temple by drinking wine with a large number of nobles and his wives and concubines. He did not honour God but praised the gods of silver and gold. This displeased the Lord and His judgment fell upon Beltshazzar.

Afterwards a joint-rule by Medes and Persians was established. It was a short-lived government. Then came Alexander the Great who conquered

the Medo-Persians and established the Empire of Greece. With the premature death of Alexander, his Empire was divided among his four officials. One of them was Ptolemy who ruled Palestine, Egypt etc. The Jews were spread everywhere in Egypt and Palestine. The devout Jews were always expecting the coming of Messiah.

Bible Translation

It is at this time that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek for the first time (B.C.285). This translation work was carried out by 70 Hebrew rabbis (scholars). Hence, it came to be known as 'Septuagint' after the number '70' in Greek. This happened in Alexandria.

Torture of Jews

After Ptolemy, the Syrian Empire became stronger. The Syrian king Antiochus Eppippanus conquered Palestine. He tortured the Jews very cruelly. The religious freedom of the Jews was totally banned. They were forced to eat pig which was ritually unclean for them. (Levi. 11:1-8). Those who protested the king were killed. A group of Jews known as Maccabees also revolted against the king. Yet they failed to prevail. In spite of all this, God protected the Jews even in that period.

The Roman Empire

With the Roman Empire becoming stronger in B.C.63, others lost power. Palestine also passed under the Roman rule. The Jews enjoyed some freedom under the Romans. Palestine was tributary to the Roman government.

Birth of John the Baptist

Now an important event that occurred during this period was the birth of John the Baptist. He was born during the reign of Tiberius Ceasar. John was born in a priestly family. He was the son of Zecharia and Elizabeth. He was the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus was also born about the same time. To be correct, Jesus was born just a few months later.

John the Baptist was the fore-runner of Christ. He introduced Jesus Christ to the world. The Roman Empire survived some more centuries after Christ. During those times, the Christian Church was persecuted by the Roman emperors very cruelly. The notorious among those emperors are Nero, Saverus Ceaser, and Vespation etc.

Memory Verse: Malachi 3:1

"See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant whom you desire, will come" says the Lord Almighty. (NIV)

EXERCISE

Answer the following Questions in your note book:

1. *What are the efforts achieved by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah?*
2. *What do we mean by 'Period of silence'?*
3. *Why did the empire of Babylon fall at the time of Belteshazzar?*
4. *What is 'Septuagint'? Why is it called so?*
5. *Who was the cruel king of Syria? Describe his cruelty towards the Jews?*
6. *Write in brief about the Empire of Rome?*
7. *How was the Roman rule for the Church?*