

The World into Which Christ Came - The Period Between the Testaments -

Galatians 4:4

INTRODUCTION:

- A. **Galatians 4:4** - But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
 - 1. In order for us to enter Jesus' world, He first had to enter ours.
 - 2. In order for us to come to Christ, Christ first had to us.
- B. Early readers of the Gospel accounts were familiar with the world into which Jesus Came, but most people today are not.
- C. Regarding the land of Palestine in Christ's day, the natural scenery is the same as when Abraham first pitched his tent at Shechem, but all else has changed.
- D. The period during which most of the changes occurred were the years between the Old Testament and the New Testament record.
- E. Changes from Old Testament times included:
 - 1. The synagogue had become a key feature of the religious scene.
 - 2. Sects (groups), such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, exerted great influence.
 - 3. Palestine (Canaan) was ruled by Rome.
- F. When the Old Testament closed, many Jews had recently returned to Canaan from Babyonian Captivity and were under Persian rule.
- G. The last Old Testament **historical** book written was Nehemiah.
- H. The last Old Testament prophetic book was Malachi.
- I. The Jews were looking for God's Messiah and the messenger who would prepare the way for Him. Malachi had written in **Malachi 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.

A PERIOD OF SILENCE

- A. Between Malachi and the events in the Gospel Accounts, there were approximately 400+ (400 to 430 years) years of prophetic silence.
1. The last Old Testament Scripture was written around 430 B.C.
 2. The first New Testament events – those related to the birth of John the Baptist – took place around 5 B.C.
 3. During this time God did not send special inspired messengers to Israel.
 4. During this time the Israelites were guided by the written Law and Prophets (Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16; Luke 24:14)
- B. Why did allow this interlude of four plus centuries before sending His Son?
1. Perhaps God desired to dramatize the most important event in history of mankind. By the time Jesus finally came, anticipation was at an extremely high level.
 2. Perhaps god wanted to make the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies more impressive. The long interval would ensure that the fulfillment was not contrived.
 3. Perhaps God was waiting until the religious and political situation was exactly right for the Messiah's mission.
 - a. Galatians 4:4 - **But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**
 - b. The NLT (New Living Translation) renders it: **"But when the right time came, God sent His Son."**
- C. During the 400 or so years between the testaments, God was moving in the affairs of men, working out His purposes.
1. The political framework of those years was outlined in Daniel 2 in a dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.
 - a. **Daniel 2:31-33** - **You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome.**

32 This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,

33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

- b. Daniel told King Necuchadnezzar that he (as ruler over the kingdom of Babylon) was represented by the head of gold.
- c. Then the prophet said in **Daniel 2:39-40** - But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.

- 2. We know from the Scriptures and history that the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 were:
 - a. The Babylonian Empire
 - b. The Medo-Persian Empire
 - c. The Grecian Empire
 - d. The Roman Empire
- 3. For us, the most important aspect of the promise is that God would set up His kingdom (Daniel 2:44) – a promise fulfilled when the church was established.

FOUR EMPIRES

A. THE MEDO-PERSIAN PERIOD (539-333 B.C.)

- 1. The Medes and Persians combined forces to conquer the world.
- 2. The Persians were more predominant, thus it is often called the Persian Empire.
- 3. When the Old Testament came to a close, the Persians controlled Canaan.
- 4. The Book of Esther takes place during the days of the Persian Empire.
- 5. The Persians allowed the Jewish nation to be ruled by the high priest, subject to a neighboring Persian governor. NOTE: The high priest and politics begin to mix.

6. During this period, tension grew between the returning Jews and the mixed-race inhabitants of Canaan **Ezra 4:4-5** - Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.
 - a. These inhabitants had largely settled north of Judah in the area known as Samaria and became known as Samaritans.
 - b. Jews left by Assyria inter-married people repatriated to Israel after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 B.C.

B. **THE GRECIAN PERIOD (133-165 B.C.)** Known as “The Macedonian Period,” since Alexander the Great was from Macedonia. Daniel 8:21 uses the word “Greece.”

1. **ALEXANDER THE GREAT** (333-323 B.C.)
 - a. In 336 B.C. twenty-eight year-old Alexander the Great assumed command of the army of Greece.
 - b. Within a few years he conquered the whole world.
 - c. Alexander took control of Jerusalem about 333 B.C.
 1. Flavius Josephus tells how the high priest welcomed the conqueror outside the walls of the city.
 2. Alexander gave special privileges to the Jews.
 3. He used them as colonists, persuading them to settle in far-flung areas of his empire.
 - a. NOTE: Would this not explain why Jews from so many nations were present in Jerusalem in Acts 2?
 - b. **Providential** in that the Jews would take a knowledge of God, their Scriptures, and prophecies to other parts of the world and provide an awareness and anticipation of the Messiah.
 - c. During this period the scribes made their appearance as a distinct class among the Jews.
 - d. Alexander’s death in 323 B.C. was followed by a twenty-year struggle for power.
 1. Ultimately his kingdom was divided into four territories.
 - a. Greece

- b. Asia
 - b. Egypt
 - c. Syria
2. This division of Alexander the Great's kingdom into four parts was prophesied in Daniel 8:8-21.
 3. From a Biblical standpoint, the two that interest us are Egypt and Syria.
 1. The **Ptolemies** took control of Egypt. The name "Ptolemies" was derived from the name of the general who gained control of Egypt.
 2. The **Seleucids** ruled over Syria. The name "Seleucids" comes from the name of the general who gained control of Syria (Seleucus).
2. **THE PTOLEMIES** (323-198 B.C.)
- a. Situated between Egypt and Syria, Palestine was trapped in the struggle between the two powers.
 1. When Egyptian armies marched to Syria, they would capture Palestine on their way north.
 2. When Syrian armies moved south toward Egypt, they tried to seize Palestine either coming or going.
 - b. Over the next hundred years, the Jews were occasionally under the control of Syria, but most of the time they were subject to Egypt. The time of the Ptolemy rule was basically a peaceful period for the Jewish people.
 1. Ptolemy 1 captured Jerusalem and took a number of Jews to help colonize Alexandria.
 2. He gave them full citizenship.
 3. A significant achievement was the translation of the Septuagint in Egypt.
 - a. Ptolemy II commissioned a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures for the great library of Alexandria.
 - b. The translation was completed around 285 B.C.
 - c. According to tradition, it was produced by seventy Jewish scholars, hence the name "Septuagint," which means seventy.

- d. **Providential** in that that now the Scriptures would be available in a common language of the non-Jewish people as well.
- e. Many Old Testament quotations by New Testament writers and speakers are from the Septuagint.
- 4. The struggle between Egypt and Syria continued throughout this period. Finally around 198 B.C., Palestine came under Syrian domination.
- 3. **THE SELEUCIDS** (198-165 B.C.)
 - a. To facilitate their rule of the land, the Seleucids divided Palestine into five provinces:
 - 1. Judea
 - 2. Samaria
 - 3. Galilee
 - 4. Perea
 - 5. Trachonitis
 - b. The period of Syrian rule was the darkest in the history of Judaism. The principal villain was Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes.
 - 1. One brotherhood writer (F. LaGard Smith) labeled him “**one of the cruelest men ever to hold public office.**”
 - 2. It is generally agreed that several prophecies in Daniel refer to the tyrannical reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. **Daniel 8:9-11** - **And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.**
 - 3. Observe the treachery of Antiochis Epiphanes:
 - a. Antiochus Epiphanes (175-165 B.C.) hated the Jewish people and tried to make Greeks of them.
 - b. He erected a temple to Jupiter in Jerusalem and tried to stamp out the Jewish religion.
 - c. He closed the Temple.

- d. He made circumcision illegal.
- e. He promised death to any who practiced Judaism.
- f. He sold thousands of Jews into slavery.
- g. He killed thousands more.
- h. He took treasures from the temple.
- i. He sacrificed a sow (pig) on the altar of the Lord.
 - 1. Then he put the ashes in water and sprinkled “sow water” throughout the temple.
 - 2. Since the pig was an unclean animal to the Jews (Leviticus 11:3-7), these actions desecrated the holy structure of the Jews.

4. **THE PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE** (165-63 B.C.)

- a. The atrocities of Antiochus Epiphanes motivated a Jewish insurrection led by an aged priest named Mattathias.
- b. Matthias had five bold and warlike sons, one of whom was Judas
- c. Judas became the leader of the revolt.
 - 1. Judas was known as “Judas the Hammer.”
 - 2. The Greek word for Hammer is “Macabee,” so he was known as Judas Macabee and the revolt came to be known as the Maccabean Revolt and the Maccabean period of Jewish history.
 - 3. It is also known as the Asmonean (or Hasmonean) period (derived from the name of Hashmon, an ancestor of Mattathias).
 - 4. Under Judas Maccabeus:
 - a. Jerusalem was re-conquered in 165 B.C.
 - b. The temple was purified and rededicated to Jehovah. NOTE: This was the origin of the Feast of Dedication. John 10:22
- d. During this period:
 - 1. Jewish sects (groups) arose, including the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
 - 2. The office of the high priest became more a political position than a religious one. High priests were appointed by whoever was in power.
 - a. Moses had decreed that the high priest must be a descendant of Aaron (Exodus 29:9; Numbers 25:10-13), usually the oldest son.
 - b. Apparently, Moses’ instructions were forgotten or ignored.

- d. The closing years of this period were years of civil strife.
 - 1. Different members of John Hyrcanus' descendants were rivals for the throne. There were:
 - a. Plots
 - b. Counter plots
 - c. Political assassinations
 - 2. Seeking Rome's involvement in the Jewish dispute was like the chickens inviting a fox into the hen house to arbitrate their differences. It was not long before the Jews lost their independence . . . again.

C. **THE ROMAN PERIOD** (63 B.C. – AD 70)

- 1. Jerusalem was conquered by Pompey the Great in 63 B.C.
 - a. Rome was co-ruled by Pompey and Julius Caesar.
 - b. Ultimately, Julius Caesar took control.
 - c. Romans rulers during the lifetime of Jesus were:
 - 1. Augustus (Octavius) Caesar (27 B.C. - AD 14)
 - 2. Tiberias Caesar (AD 14-37)
- 2. Palestine was put under rulers responsible to Rome.
 - a. Initially, Antipater was made ruler of Judea.
 - b. He was succeeded by his son, Herod the great, who was king of Judea (37 B.C. – 3 AD). Luke 1:5
 - 1. Herod had a genius for governing, but his vices exceeded his governing skills.
 - 2. He aroused the hatred of the Jews by introducing chariot races and other Greek customs into Jerusalem.
 - 3. In an attempt to regain their favor, he began rebuilding the temple which had been basically destroyed by Antiochus Epiphanes.
 - 4. This is the same Herod that had the babies killed in Bethlehem in an attempt to destroy Jesus. Matthew 2:1-18
- 3. When Herod died, Palestine was placed in the hands of a tetrarchy ("rule of four").
 - a. **Archelaus**, a son of Herod, was put over Judea and Samaria. Matthew 2:22

- b. **Herod Antipas**, another son of Herod.
 - 1. Sometimes called simply “Herod” and sometimes distinguished as “Herod the tetrarch in the New Testament.
 - 2. Was made tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, Luke 3:1; Matthew 14:1
 - 3. Best known of the Herods since he ruled during the personal ministry of Jesus.
 - c. **Philip**, a third son of Herod, was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, sometimes called the Bashan district, east of the Sea of Galilee.
 - 1. Bashan is often mentioned in the Old Testament (Joshua 22:7; 1 Chronicles 6:71; Isaiah 33:9), but not in the New Testament.
 - 2. The southern part of the Bashan area was called “Decapolis,” which meant “ten cities.”
 - a. There were more than ten cities in the area, but apparently ten were considered predominant.
 - b. Bet-Shean was the only one west of the Jordan River.
 - d. A fourth area, called Abilene, was given to **Lysanias**, who was not a Herod. Lysanias was not a part of the area that had been ruled by Herod the Great.
4. The Romans gave the Jews a number of concessions.
- a. They exempted Jews from Military service.
 - b. Jews could not be called to court on the Sabbath day.
 - c. They were allowed to issue copper coins with inscriptions only and no image. It is true that coins did circulate with the image of Caesar (Matthew 22:20), but Jews did not have to handle the “accursed coins” except to pay their taxes to Rome.
 - d. Roman soldiers were forbidden to carry banners in images in their land.

THE LAND OF PALESTINE

A. Names:

- 1. Called Canaan in the Old Testament.
- 2. By New Testament times was known as Palestine.
 - a. The name “Palestine” does not appear in the New Testament.
 - b. “Palestine” was derived from the Philistines (“Philistia).

- c. The Maccabees fought against the Philistines, but the Philistines are not mentioned by name in the New Testament.
- 3. The Gospel Accounts record around 150 events in the life of Christ. A hundred or so of these are tied with specific geographical locations.
- 4. A popular way of speaking of the length of the land of Palestine was “from Dan to Beersheba” (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 1 Kings 4:25)
 - a. From Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south was a distance of about 150 miles.
 - b. The land covered between 10,000 and 12,000 square miles.
 - c. By way of comparison, forty of the fifty United States are larger than this.
- B. Three provinces were prominent in the life of Christ, all of them west of the Jordan River.
 - 1. **JUDEA**
 - a. The province of Judea was dominated by the Jews.
 - b. Judeans were proud of their orthodoxy.
 - c. Jesus frequently visited Judea, especially during feast days.
 - 2. **SAMARIA**
 - a. Samaria was occupied by the people known as “Samaritans.”
 - b. Jesus sometimes passed through Samaria on His way north or south.
 - 3. **GALILEE**
 - a. Galilee had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles
 - b. It was looked upon as a backward area by Jews in Judea.
 - c. Jesus spent most of His life in Galilee.

OTHER CHANGES: The closing days of the Old Testament and the years between the Testaments also affected the Jewish world in other ways.

A. CHANGES IN DESIGNATION

- 1. By the end of the Old Testament, God’s people were already known as “**Jews**” (Ezra 4:12; 5:1). The name was derived from the southern kingdom of Judah.
 - a. Most who returned from the Babylonian captivity were descendants of people from that area, and from the tribe of Judah.
 - b. By New Testament times, “Jews” was the primary designation used for

- these people. Matthew 2:2; John 1:19
2. There were occasionally called **Israelites**, thus indicating that they were descendants of Israel. John 1:47; 2 Corinthians 11:22
 3. Because of their traditional language, they were also sometimes labeled "**Hebrews.**" Acts 6:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:22

B. **CHANGES IN LANGUAGE**

1. After the return from the Babylonian Captivity, **Aramaic** gradually replaced Hebrew as the common language of the Jews. Aramaic, the language of Syria, was similar to Hebrew, as Italian is to Latin.
2. Jewish boys still learned **Hebrew** in school.
3. The universal language in Jesus' day was **Greek**.
4. The official language of the Roman government was **Italian**.
5. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the sign above His head was written in three languages:
 - a. Hebrew – for the Jews to read.
 - b. Latin – for the Romans to read.
 - c. Greek – for everybody to read.

C. **CHANGES IN OCCUPATION**

1. Before the captivity, the Jews were primarily farmers and herdsman.
2. Separated from their property during the Captivity, they discovered that they possessed trading skills.
3. By the time of Jesus, Jewish businessmen were scattered all over the world.

D. **CHANGES IN WORSHIP**

1. The **Temple** in Jerusalem.
 - a. Was still important to the Jews.
 - b. Had been built by Zerubbabel after the return from the Babylonian Captivity, but had been largely destroyed by Antiochus Epiphanes.
 - c. Herod the Great had begun rebuilding (and enlarging) the Temple about sixteen years before Jesus' birth.
 1. The project was still underway during Jesus' ministry.

- 2. Was not completed until the late 60s AD, shortly before it was destroyed in AD 70. Some believe it still was not completed at the time of its destruction.
- d. The faithful who lived in Palestine traveled to Jerusalem several times a year for various feasts.
- e. Pious Jews in other lands also made the arduous journey to Jerusalem from time to time. Acts 2:5-11

2. Synagogues

- a. By the time of Jesus the synagogue was the heart of religious life among the Jews.
- b. Not mentioned in the Old Testament but prominent in the New. Matthew 12:9; 13:54
- c. The synagogue probably originated while the Jews were in captivity and unable to go to Jerusalem on the prescribed feast days.
- d. It took ten Jewish men to organize a synagogue.
- e. The word “synagogue” actually referred to the people rather than the building. Nevertheless, the word is often used in the New Testament to refer to the building in which the people met. Luke 7:5
- f. There were hundreds of synagogues around the world.
- g. It is said that that there were some 280 synagogues in Jerusalem.
- h. The Sabbath services in the synagogue were simple. **Order of a synagogue service:**
 1. First, the “Shema” would be recited. This is Deuteronomy 6:4 which the Jews would repeat several times daily. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is Our God. The Lord is one!” (NASB)
 2. Then certain prayers would be spoken.
 3. Then a reading from the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy).
 4. Then a reading from the prophets (intended to illustrate the Law).
 5. Then a sermon. The synagogue rulers would decide who was to lead the service and give the sermon. A different person would be chosen to lead each week.
 6. Since it was customary for the synagogue leader to invite visiting rabbis to speak, Paul usually would have an open door when he went to a synagogue. But as soon as he spoke about Jesus as the

Messiah, the door would often slam shut. Usually they would not be invited back by the religious leaders, and sometimes they would be thrown out of town.

The invitation from the synagogue rulers was to speak *a message of encouragement*. What an open invitation for the gospel! There can be no more encouraging word than the fact that God has come to earth and opened a door to heaven, providing atonement for sin and offering new life in Jesus Christ! Such an invitation was all Paul needed.

- i. Attached to most synagogues were schools which Jewish boys in the area were required to attend.

E. CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

1. PRIESTS

- a. In the Old Testament, the priests were the recognized religious leaders. Their work was supplemented by an occasional prophet sent from God.
- b. During Jesus' ministry, Judaism had two high priests. Luke 3:2
 1. The high priest Annas had been removed from the high priesthood by the Roman governor, but he had enough influence to have his son-in-law Caiaphas (John 18:13) appointed. Matthew 26:3, 57; John 11:49; 18:24
 2. In the eyes of most Jews, Annas remained the true high priest. Acts 4:6

2. RABBIS

- a. Were teachers in the synagogues and the synagogue schools.
- b. "Rabbi" is a transliterated word meaning "my master". It can also mean "my teacher."
- c. "Rabboni" is a variation of "rabbi" John 20:16
- d. Jesus was called "Rabbi" by His disciples as a sign of respect. Matthew 26:25; Mark 9:5; John 3:2
- e. Rabbis had largely replaced the priests as the religious authorities.

- f. For some, rabbinic interpretations of the Law had the same weight as the law itself. These interpretations were eventually gathered into a volume known as the **Talmud**.

3. **SCRIBES**

- a. The Greek word translated “scribe” (“grammateus”) literally means writers.
- b. Originally scribes had the responsibility of recording events.
- c. In 2 Samuel 8:17 the word translated “secretary” in the NASB is the word for “scribe.”
- d. By New Testament times, the scribes were responsible for making copies of the Old Testament. They were known as authorities on the Law and sometimes were called “lawyers” Luke 7:30; 1:45-46, 52
- e. The King James translation occasionally uses the word “doctor” to refer to teachers of the Law. Luke 2:46; 5:17
- f. They were not specialists in civil law, but in religious law.
- g. Many of the scribes were Pharisees.

4. **PHARISEES**

- a. “Pharisee” is from a Hebrew verb meaning “to separate”
- b. Some writers believe that the Pharisees originated when pressure was exerted during the time of the Seleucid domination for Jews to accept Greek culture.
- c. Originally, Pharisees blended patriotism with religious devotion.
- d. By the time of Jesus, they had deteriorated into a sect of self-righteousness and formalism . Matthew 23:1-36
- e. They were small in number, but they were popular with the people and thus had considerable influence.
- f. For all practical purposes, they considered the inspired “traditions of the elders (Mark 7:3) as binding as the Law itself. When Jesus Disregarded these traditions (Matthew 15:1-14), **the Pharisees became His bitterest enemies.**

5. **SADDUCEES**

- a. Some have suggested that the name “Sadducee” may have been derived from Zadok, the first of the high-priestly line under Solomon (1 Kings 1:32-45; Ezekiel 40:45; 44:15)
- b. Every High Priest from the time of Herod to the fall of Jerusalem was a Sadducee.
- c. Sadducees were a wealthy aristocratic group, many of which were priests.
- d. Some believe that the Sadducees originated about the same time as the Pharisees.
- e. They did accept Greek ways.
- f. Because of their willingness to cooperate with whoever was in power, they became a political force.
- g. Because of their acceptance of Greek philosophy, they rejected the concepts of resurrection and life after death. Mark 12:18; Acts 23:6-8
- h. They came to hate Jesus because He threatened their authority.

6. **HERODIANS**

- a. A politically active group dedicated to placing a Herod on the throne over all Palestine.
- b. Matthew 22:16; Mark 3:6; 12:13; Mark 8:15

7. **ZEALOTS**

- a. A band of Jewish rebels dedicated to overcoming Rome with the sword.
- b. One from this group, Simon, became an apostle. Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15

8. **ESSENES**

- a. A body of religious extremists who had separated themselves from society.
- b. They may have originated from within the ranks of the Pharisees.
- c. Many believe that the Qumran community (the source of the famed Dead Sea Scrolls) was associated with the Essenes.
- d. The name “Essenes” does not appear in the Bible.

- e. Some have associated John the Baptist as being an Essenes. Others believe to the contrary

F. **MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS**

1. "Messiah" is from a Hebrew word ("Mashiach") meaning "Anointed" (one)
2. The Greek equivalent ("Christos") is "Christ."
3. While the Jews' hopes for the coming of the Messiah, apparently false Messiahs had apparently arisen, fanning the hopes of Israel.
4. Basically, Jesus was rejected because he did not fit the Jews' preconceived concept of the Messiah.
5. Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 52:2 that the Messiah would grow up "like a root out of parched ground."
5. God had prepared for His coming (Galatians 4:4); but the hearts of the people were still like parched, dry earth.

