



UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

How Read and Interpret the Bible

A CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adapted from several resources including "The Spirit Filled Life Bible," Dr. Jack Hayford, General Editor; "Walk Through The Bible" by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa; and Halley's Bible Handbook

I. THE ERA OF BEGINNINGS | Genesis 1 - 11:26

- A. The Creation account - Genesis 1-2
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THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD | The 400 “Silent Years”

Between the last writings of the Old Testament and the appearance of Christ, several major developments set the stage for the Gospel story. The political, religious, and social atmosphere of Palestine changed significantly during what some refer to as the “400 silent years”. Much of what happened was predicted by the prophet Daniel (chapters 2, 7, 8, and 11) and compare to historical events.

This period begins when the book of Malachi was completed (397 B.C.) until the angel’s announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. During this time there were no prophets and no inspired writers of divine revelation. Six historical divisions are observable.

1. The Persian Era (397-336 B.C.)

The Persians were the dominating power in the Middle East as far back as 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar overcame the Southern Kingdom of Judah and destroyed

Jerusalem. God had already used the Persians to deliver Israel from Babylonian captivity (Daniel 5:30, 31). Yet in the book of Malachi, we see a people who were lukewarm and argumentative with God. Idolatry and corruption were prominent. During this time, the rise of the synagogue as the local center of worship was an important detail as it led to the building of the temple. This event encouraged the ultimate social and religious separation between Jew and Samaritan.

2. The Greek Era (336 - 323 B.C.) where Alexander the Great was the central figure. He conquered Persia, Babylon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and western India, dying at the age of thirty-three. His aim was to found a world-wide empire united by language, custom and civilization. His prestige was key to the spreading of the gospel many years later because he influenced the world to speak and study Greek. This process is called Hellenization and caused many struggles with the Jews as it affected their culture and religion. Because of Alexander the Great, the Greek language was widespread by 270 B.C. to bring about the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint.
3. The death of Alexander the Great led to the Egyptian Era (323 - 198 B.C.) The Greek empire was divided into four segments: Ptolemy - Egypt and Africa, Lysimachus - Asia Minor, Cassander - Europe, and Selenus - Syria. Conflicts between Egypt and Syria arose and Israel was caught in the middle. During this time the Septuagint was authorized and two religious parties emerged: the Hellenizing party, which was pro-Syrian, and the orthodox Jews, in particular the Hasidim or "Pious Ones" (predecessors of the Pharisees). The two struggled for power and this conflict brought about the attack of Antiochus the Great in 168 B.C.
4. The Syrian Era (198 - 165 B.C.) Antiochus the Great set about destroying every distinctive characteristic of the Jewish faith. He mutilated the scriptures and forced Jews to eat Pork and make sacrifices to idols. A few years later, Antiochus Epiphanes (son of Antiochus the Great) became one of the most vicious and violent persecutors the Jews ever knew. He invaded Egypt and then returned to Jerusalem (surprising many Jews who thought he was dead) to overturn the city. His most vile act was in the contamination of the Holy of Holies by sprinkling the blood of an unclean animal all over the sanctuary making it defiled and violated. One cannot grasp how horrifying this must have been to the Jews.
5. The Maccabean Era (165 - 63 B.C.) In accordance with a prophecy in Daniel 8:14, the temple was not cleansed (1 Maccabees 1:39-41) until six and a half years later under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus hence the Maccabean Era. During this time, Jerusalem was retaken and worship in the temple was thus restored. Many futile attempts were made to defeat the Maccabeans by Syria but finally the Jews received their independence in 142 B.C. This ended in 63 B.C. when Pompey of Rome took Syria and entered Israel.
6. The Roman Era (63 - 4 B.C.) It seems as though Israel's hopes of freedom from oppression were lost during this time. Herod the Great became King of Israel around 40 B.C. and he planned and carried out the building of the new temple in Jerusalem. However, he was a devoted Hellenist and mercilessly killed anyone who opposed him, even his own family. This was the man on the throne when Jesus was born in Bethlehem - what a dark and desperate situation for

God's people! It seems that God allows a desperate situation to arise before presenting His message or providing deliverance.

7. During the 400 years between the Testaments, God was silent in terms of speaking through a prophet, but He was clearly at work! He was preparing the way for His Son. This period of history is of vital importance to the establishment of God's complete written revelation to man.
8. The God of Israel then shattered this silence with the announcement of His only Son - Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews!