

## Lesson 119

# 400 Years of Waiting

God prepares the world for Jesus.

# Studying God's Word

Don't forget! Review the Optional Supplements and determine where you can use them.

## Introduction

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. We have journeyed through the entire Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi!

### Slide #3

Refer to Lesson 118 Theme Poster. In the last book of the Old Testament, we saw how God gave Malachi two messages: a message of warning for the priests who were sacrificing imperfect offerings and a message of hope that the Messiah would come.

What kinds of animals were the priests and the people offering on God's altar? Lame, blind, and sick.

God had commanded that the animal sacrifices be the best of the flock, animals without blemish. He could not bless the people when their hearts and actions were not right. God desires a broken and sorrowful heart toward sin.

Malachi also wrote that a messenger would come before the Messiah to prepare his way. But it would be 400 more years before the messenger would arrive. This time period is known as the "intertestamental period," but it is also called the "silent years" because there was no new word from God.

Now, 400 years is a long time to wait, isn't it? To help us think about how much things can change in 400 years, let's work backwards from our time to see how different things were 400 years ago.

Have optional items ready to show along with the timeline. Draw a simple timeline (horizontal line) on the board, which you'll use to illustrate the years going backward. You may add/change the questions/examples below so they relate to your students (e.g., the year your church was founded or the year your city/country was founded).

### Slide #4

We're in the year 20\_\_\_\_\_. At the end of the timeline, draw a short vertical line and write the current year above it. If we went back about 50 years ago, cell phones hadn't been invented yet! Mark a line for 1970 and write "No cell phones." If you brought items, show a cell phone.

How old is the oldest person you know? Maybe a grandparent, great-grandparent, or someone in our church? Allow answers.

Most of us know someone in their 80s or 90s or maybe even someone who lived to 100! About 100 years ago, things were changing in America. More

people were living and working in cities. People were buying the first cars, like the Model T Ford, to replace travel by horse and wagon. Mark a line for 1920 and write "Car travel." Show a toy car or picture of a Model T.

If we go back about 200 years, America was a new nation, not yet 50 years old. Mark a line for 1820 and write "Early America." Show a US flag.

Finally, if we traveled back in time about 400 years, we would get to see the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown, but the rest of the country was mostly unexplored, except by the Native Americans. Mark a line for 1600 and write "Early settlers." Show a compass or an ear of corn to represent exploration or farming.

Refer to the timeline on the board. Just as things have changed a lot in the last 400 years with new discoveries and inventions like cars and cell phones, the 400 years between Malachi and Jesus' first coming had a lot of changes, too. Today, we'll learn about some of those events and the people involved during the 400 years of waiting.

## Daniel's Vision

Just because God was not speaking to his people through prophets does not mean that he was not at work. The 400-year period was a very eventful time of history, and it is clear that God was sovereignly guiding kings, nations, and people according to his plan.

Refer to the Attributes of God Poster. Who will read the definitions of sovereign and omniscient from the poster? Sovereign: in complete control of everything; does all that he pleases. Omniscient: knows everything—past, present, and future.

Because of God's sovereignty and omniscience, he knew exactly when and where events in history would take place. He chose to give some important prophecies to Daniel about what would happen during the 400 years.

Who remembers some things about Daniel in the Bible? Allow discussion. He was one of the Hebrew young men taken into captivity in Babylon. He was chosen to be trained to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. He refused to defile himself with the king's food. He could understand and interpret dreams. He served many kings. He was thrown into a lions' den for praying to God, but God rescued him.

One of the gifts God gave Daniel was the understanding of dreams and visions. Daniel interpreted dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted the handwriting on the wall for King Belshazzar. But God also gave Daniel his own visions of future events.

One vision happened during the reign of King Belshazzar. Belshazzar was the last Babylonian king before the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and set up their own king, named Darius.

In Daniel's vision, he saw two animals, a ram with two uneven horns (one was bigger than the other), and a goat with one great horn. The ram,

which is a male sheep, charged all over the place with great power, and no one could stop him. But then the goat attacked and trampled the ram in a rage! The ram was defeated, and the goat grew in power. In the vision, the goat's one great horn broke, and four smaller horns replaced it. Out of one of these four horns a little horn grew until it was great and powerful. Then it took away the burnt offerings and overthrew the temple in Jerusalem.

Wow! That's a pretty strange vision, isn't it? When Daniel woke up, he wanted to understand what this vision meant. What did these animals and horns stand for?

Slide #5

Slide #6

Slide #7

Daniel 8:20–24

Thankfully, God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Daniel what it meant. Turn in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 8. We'll read verses 20–24. Choose readers.

Who is the ram with the two horns? The kings of Media and Persia.  
 Who is the goat? The king of Greece.  
 Who is the great horn on the goat? The first king of Greece.  
 What do the four horns represent? Four kingdoms would arise from Greece.  
 In Daniel's vision, one of the four horns grew greater than the other three.  
 Verses 23–24 describe this king who becomes great. What kinds of things would he do? He will cause destruction, succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the saints.

After Gabriel left, Daniel was overwhelmed by the vision and kept thinking about what it meant. He felt sick when he thought about what these future kings would do to Jerusalem and his people. But God was in control, even though the future sounded scary to Daniel.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Things happened just as God had shown Daniel. The Medes and Persians conquered Babylon and controlled most of the known world. The Medo-Persian Empire is the ram in Daniel's vision. Daniel was alive when this prophecy came true, and he served King Darius the Mede. The Jews returned to Judah with the permission of Persian kings. Then Malachi came with his messages around the time of Nehemiah.

Slide #8

Slide #9

Slide #10

Let's start our Class Notes. You'll write the matching letter from the right to answer each question on the left. Who will read #1 and give the answer?

Choose a reader. B. Persians. Have students complete #1.

Who will read #2 about the goat in Daniel's vision? Choose a reader. A. Greeks. Have students complete #2.

Who will read #3 about the ram? Choose a reader. B. Persians. Have students complete #3.

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Less than 100 years after Malachi's prophecies, Alexander the Great rose to power in Greece and began his

famous conquest of the known world. Alexander is the great horn on the goat. Within 13 years, Greece had conquered all of the powerful nations including Persia, Syria, and Egypt. Alexander died without a son to take his place, and his empire was divided between his generals, forming four kingdoms. These four kingdoms are the four horns on the goat in Daniel's vision.

The Greek leaders forced the Jews and other people they conquered to learn the Greek language. They wanted the people in their kingdom to follow Greek ideas and religion, which included the worship of many false gods like Zeus, Poseidon, and Apollo. At first, the Greek leaders ruling Israel let the Jews worship the true God.

But one Greek ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem because the Jews were not loyal to him. Antiochus caused terrible destruction just like the one horn that grew in Daniel's vision. He made laws against Jewish religion, destroyed the temple and set up an altar to Zeus, and required the Jews to offer pagan sacrifices (including pigs, which were forbidden by God's law). The Jews were furious by this defilement of God's temple and altar. But Antiochus kept his soldiers in Israel to enforce his rules.

Some Jews, however, refused to offer the defiling sacrifices commanded by Antiochus. A priest named Mattathias was one such man. His resistance started a revolt, led by his sons, against Antiochus and his soldiers. One of Mattathias' sons, Judas, who led the fighting, was nicknamed Maccabee, which means "Hammer." His fight against Antiochus became known as the Maccabean Revolt. They won many difficult battles and were successful in retaking the temple and cleansing it of all the terrible things Antiochus had done to it. The Jews celebrate a special festival to remember this event. How many of you have heard of Hanukkah before? Show of hands.

Hanukkah is a festival of lights to remember when the Jews took back the temple and cleansed it from all the terrible things Antiochus had done. Some people still celebrate Hanukkah today when lights are lit to remember when the lampstands were relit and worship of God was restored. When Jews celebrate Hanukkah today, it is often in late November or December.

Looking back at the history of the Medo-Persian and Greek empires, we see Daniel's vision fulfilled just as God showed him. At the end of the Greek period, all the nations that had been under Greek rule understood the Greek language.

Remember, this all happened in the years before Jesus was born. Why was it important to have one main language before God sent Jesus to earth? Allow discussion.

Can you guess what language the New Testament was written in? Greek.

If Alexander the Great hadn't conquered so many nations and made the people learn Greek, by the time of Christ people would still have been speaking their own languages. But because Greek was now the common

language of trade and study, the gospel could be spread in a language that most people understood.

### Slide #11

Let's go back to the Class Notes. Who will read #4? Choose a reader. A. Greeks. Have students complete #4.

And who will read #5 about the defilement of the temple? Choose a reader. A. Greeks. Have students complete #5.

## **Jewish Groups**

Have Cue Cards ready to pass out.

When the Jews were under Greek rule for over 150 years, the people were divided between those who wanted to be like the Greeks and those who didn't. This led to some different Jewish groups we will see in the New Testament.

### Slide #12

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. These two main groups are the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Raise your hand if you've heard these names before. Show of hands.

I have three Pharisee and three Sadducee cards. Who will read these for us? Choose volunteers to come up front and give them each a cue card. Have the three Pharisees stand opposite the three Sadducees so the two groups are separate but facing each other.

We'll start with Card 1 and hear each card read in order as a conversation between these two groups. So, when the student is finished reading the Pharisee's line for Card 1, be ready to read Card 2 with the Sadducee's line right after. Have students read Cards 1-6 in order then return to their seats.

Have students reread cards as necessary to help answer the questions.

Which group wanted to be separate from the Greeks: the Pharisees or the Sadducees? Pharisees.

What did the Sadducees think about the Greeks? They could help the Jews prosper if they worked with them. They had improved things like learning and trade.

The Sadducees were the group that supported and worked with the Greeks. They were usually wealthy Jews who hoped to gain political power.

What did each group think about the Word of God? The Pharisees accepted the law and the prophets as God's Word while the Sadducees only accepted the writings of Moses (law).

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. So, which books of the Old Testament did the Sadducees accept? The first five. Say the books aloud together.

This was a significant difference between the groups. Because the Sadducees didn't accept the rest of the Old Testament books as God's

Word, they ignored a big portion of Scripture. The Sadducees had different religious beliefs than the Pharisees, too. For example, they didn't believe that people would one day be resurrected (brought back to life). They also didn't believe in angels or demons.

Why did the Pharisees make up extra laws to go with God's law? What were they worried about? They didn't want to disobey God and receive punishment like what happened during the exile.

The Pharisees started out with a good desire: to obey God's laws and receive his blessing. But they created man-made laws that they wanted the Jews to obey. Here's an example of what the Pharisees did: God's law commanded the priests to wash before and after they ministered at the tabernacle or temple. The Pharisees didn't want the handwashing ritual to be forgotten while the temple was destroyed, so they made up new handwashing rules for everyday life. They wrote pages and pages of instructions about when and where Jews must wash, including after using the bathroom, after leaving a cemetery, after sleeping or napping, before eating a meal where bread is served, and sometimes even after a meal. But these washings weren't for getting rid of germs but for trying to honor God's laws.

### Slide #13

Let's go back to the Class Notes. Who will read #6? Choose a reader. C. Pharisees. Have students complete #6.

And who will read #7? Choose a reader. E. Sadducees. Have students complete #7.

Who can answer #8? Choose a reader. C. Pharisees. Have students complete #8.

Do you think it was okay for the Pharisees to add laws for the people to obey? Allow discussion.

What do you think God thought about the Pharisees' extra laws? Allow answers.

### Slide #14

### Slide #15

### Slide #16

### Slide #17

### Slide #18

### Mark 7:1-8

We know what God thought because Jesus confronted the Pharisees about their laws when he was on earth. Let's read what he said to them. Turn to the New Testament book of Mark, chapter 7. Who will read verses 1-8? Choose readers.

Why were the Pharisees upset with Jesus' disciples? They ate with unwashed (defiled) hands.

Mark was writing his account to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, so he often explained Jewish laws or customs that his readers didn't know. What did he say about washing in verses 3-4? Pharisees and Jews don't eat unless they wash first. They observe other traditions such as washing cups, pots, vessels, and dining couches.

How did Jesus respond when the Pharisees said his disciples were not following the tradition of the elders? Allow discussion. He called them hypocrites. He said their hearts were far from God and they were teaching the commandments of men rather than God's.

Jesus gave the Pharisees a strong rebuke, even calling them hypocrites! A hypocrite is someone who does the opposite of what they say or who pretends to be righteous when they aren't. Jesus quoted a passage from Isaiah about people who honor God with their lips (words) but have a heart that is far from God.

What did Jesus say the Pharisees had done in verse 8? Left God's commandment and held to their man-made tradition.

By making their own laws as important as God's, the Pharisees were actually breaking God's command to not add to his Word. They were also focusing on working to earn God's approval by obeying a bunch of made-up rules. They missed the fact that God cares more about our heart attitudes and whether we are sorry for our sins and trusting in him.

## **Roman Rule**

As much as the Pharisees wanted the Jews to remain separate from the Greek way of life, the Greek culture still influenced the Jews, especially in politics. But the Greek Empire was weakening. The independence that had been gained by the Maccabean Revolt ended with the Sadducees and Pharisees fighting each other for power.

As the Roman general Pompey conquered nearby Syria, both Jewish groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, asked him for help. Pompey came to Israel, but he didn't help either group. Instead, he conquered Jerusalem for Rome in 64 BC. All the Jews lost their freedom to the Romans, and their land would now be called Judea.

### Slide #19

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Then about 40 years before Jesus' birth, Caesar, the ruler of Rome, appointed Herod the Great as king of Judea. Herod was called "great" because of his many great building projects, including the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple needed rebuilding since Antiochus Epiphanes destroyed it during the Greek time period. Herod was still ruling at the time of Jesus' birth.

Does anyone know what Herod did when he heard from the wise men that the King of the Jews had been born? He wanted to find out where the baby was born to kill him. When the wise men didn't report back to him, Herod ordered all the boys ages two and under in Bethlehem to be killed. With the Jews under Roman rule and a cruel king, why would God choose to have Jesus born in this time period? It has something to do with the Roman Empire and their love for building. Allow answers.

The Romans were good builders, and wherever they expanded their territory, they built roads and ship ports so they could supply their troops



and trade goods between their territories.

How would this help the spread of the gospel? Allow answers.

The disciples and early Christians were able to travel using Roman roads and ships to spread the good news about Jesus. Before the Romans grew strong and made travel easier, many nations and people groups were hard to reach. God had a plan for allowing the Greeks to come to power, so their language would spread, and also for the Romans to come to power, so they could improve travel.

The New Testament is not a new story, but a continuation of history as directed by the sovereign hand of God. When we don't know the history of the Jews during the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, we can miss important background to help us understand the time into which Jesus was born.

Slide #20

Slide #21

Let's finish the Class Notes. Who will read #9 about Pompey? Choose a reader. D. Romans. Have students complete #9.

Who will read #10 about the common language? Choose a reader. A. Greeks. Have students complete #10.

And #11, who will read that? Choose a reader. D. Romans. Have students complete #11.

And the last one, #12? Choose a reader. C. Pharisees. Have students complete #12.

## Application

God is sovereign. In our journey through 400 years of history, we have seen God guide the hearts of pagan rulers, direct the armies of great nations, and control events as he would have them.

Slide #22

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. He granted power to Alexander the Great, who united the known world and made Greek a common language. This would be the language of the New Testament. The Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed about the influence of the Greeks on their people. Their fighting opened the door for Rome to conquer them. Under the leadership of Caesar, the Romans set about conquering the known world. As they went, they built roads and ports. Travel and trade increased, allowing for the movement of goods and ideas. It would be in this connected world that the gospel would be spread to both Jews and Gentiles.

How does the history we covered today help you understand why God chose to send Jesus when he did? Allow discussion.

What lessons can we learn from the mistakes of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Allow discussion. We must be careful not to add to or take away from God's Word. Following man-made rules does not please God or save us. God cares about our heart and obedience to his Word.

The Jews had 400 “silent years” of waiting for another message from God. But during that time, they had the Old Testament books to read and study. These years were not really “silent” because God was speaking through his Word. We must remember that God still speaks through his Word, even when we feel like he isn’t speaking or listening to us. That’s why daily reading and studying the Bible is so important—that’s how we hear from God.

## Lesson Review

We all learn best with review and repetition! We encourage you to play a lesson review game.

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