

New Testament Political Leaders

- **Roman Government**

- Rome was founded in 753 B.C.
- The Romans used a dating system that used the suffix A.U.C., abbreviation for Latin phrase “anno urbis conditae”, which means “from the founding of the city (Rome).” When the A.D./B.C. dating system was developed, 753 A.U.C. became 1 B.C.
- At its founding in 753 B.C., Rome was a monarchy with a king, and was ruled by a total of (7) kings until 509 B.C.
- In 509 B.C. Rome expelled its kings, and changed to the Roman Republic, not like we think of today, but a government with the power concentrated within a few families; and a governing and advisory council called the “senate.”
- As the Roman military grew, either to defend Rome, or to conquer new lands, the balance of power began to shift from the senate to key military leaders.
- In 48 B.C., Julius Caesar became the dominant leader of Rome; and took sole command of Rome as dictator. His command lasted four years until he was famously stabbed to death by a group of senators who wanted to restore liberty to Rome.
- After a civil war, in 37 B.C. Octavian (later to be Augustus), took control. He was a great nephew of Julius Caesar.
- In 27 B.C. the Roman Republic ended, and became the Roman Empire.
- In that same year, Caesar Augustus became first emperor (Caesar). He would rule until his death in A.D. 14.
- From Caesar Augustus until the “sack of Rome” in A.D. 455, there were many leaders and attempts to overthrow the leaders of Rome
- At the end of the 1st century A.D., Domitian was the Roman Emperor, and he is known as the one who sent the Apostle John to Isle of Patmos

- **Herod the Great**

- Edomite, descendant of Esau (son of Isaac, brother of Jacob)
- Roman Jewish “client king” of Judea 37-4 B.C., elected by Roman Senate
- The wisemen from the east came to this Herod, searching for the king (Jesus Christ) that had been born, they followed His star
- This Herod had all the Jewish boys two and under killed, in effort to kill Jesus (new king)
- This is the Herod that was responsible for remodeling and expanding Zerubabel’s Temple in Jerusalem
- When he died, his kingdom was split between his sons and daughter
- His son Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea

- **His son Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Peraea**
- **His son Philip ruled territories north & east of the Jordan River**
- **His daughter Salome ruled cities of Jabneh, Ashdod, & Phasaelis**
- **Archelaus**
 - **Had trouble with Romans, was called to Rome, and his territory taken over by a Roman procurator (governor)**
- **Pontius Pilate**
 - **The 5th governor of the Roman province of Judea**
 - **Served under Emperor Tiberius, from 26-36 A.D.**
 - **Best known for the Roman official who presided over the trial of Jesus, and ultimately ordered His crucifix**
- **Herod Antipas**
 - **Son of Herod the Great, ruled Galilee 4 B.C. to 39 A.D.**
- **Herod Agrippa I**
 - **Grandson of Herod the Great**
 - **King of Judea, A.D. 41-44**
 - **Nominated by Caesar Claudius Augustus (4th Roman Emperor)**
 - **Custodian of Temple, had authority to appoint High Priest**
 - **Killed James, brother of John, with sword**
 - **Arrested Peter, planned to execute him, but angel freed Peter from prison**
 - **Acts 12, stricken by God, for allowing people to call him a god, and not giving credit to the true God**
- **Herod Agrippa II**
 - **Son of Herod Agrippa I**
 - **Judean monarch**
 - **Nominated by Caesar Claudius Augustus (4th Roman Emperor)**
 - **He came to visit Festus in Caesarea, heard Apostle Paul testify about his false imprisonment, and his salvation**
- **Marcus Antonius Felix**
 - **Governor, wife Drusilla**
 - **Held Apostle Paul in prison in Caesarea for two years, Acts 26**
 - **Recalled to Rome, replaced by Porcius Festus**
- **Porcius Festus**
 - **Governor, replaced Felix**
 - **With Herod Agrippas II, heard Apostle Paul's testimony**
 - **Paul appeals his case to Caesar (Rome)**
- **Sanhedrin**
 - **The Jewish governmental body**
 - **Greek word that means "assembly or council"**

- **Included (71) members; including High Priest, chief priests, and other members of both Pharisees & Sadducees groups**
- **Pharisees**
 - **An influential religious group within Judaism, made up of mostly scribes and rabbis, with members in the Sanhedrin**
 - **They referred to themselves as “associates”**
 - **Strict followers of the Law of Moses (Torah) and “traditions of the fathers”**
 - **In many ways, they were the progressive group among the Jews**
- **Sadducees**
 - **An influential religious group within Judaism, made up of priests and certain wealthy Jews**
 - **They were not as strict for the Law of Moses, as were the Pharisees**
 - **Did not believe in the resurrection**
- **Essenes**
 - **A true religious sect within Judaism**
 - **Originated during the Maccabean revolt: 167-160 B.C.**
 - **In some ways, their teachings / requirements more demanding than Pharisees**
 - **They lived as a brotherhood in monasteries**
 - **They abstained from marriage, and held all things in common**
 - **Specialized in teachings about angels**
- **Zealots**
 - **Group of intense Jewish patriots**
 - **Believed that any and all methods were justified in the struggle to escape bondage of the Roman yoke**
- **Herodians**
 - **Political party that advocated freedom from Roman rule**
 - **Wanted the Herodian (Herods) dynasty restored, which was a royal dynasty of Edomites (descendants of Esau)**
- **Samaritans**
 - **People from Samaria, mostly descendants of the foreign peoples (moved into when the Assyrians overthrew the northern kingdom of Israel) and Jews left in Samaria by the Assyrians**
 - **The Jews of Judea held great prejudice against the Samaritans**
 - **Considered them a mixed race, despised them, and they had no dealings with them**
 - **After the return of some of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, and when the rebuilding of the 2nd Temple was begun, it was the Samaritans in 536 B.C. who worked to prevent the Temple from being rebuilt**
 - **A couple hundred years later, the Samaritans provided assistance to the armies of Alexander the Great (336-323 B.C.).**

- **Alexander gave them permission to build their own temple at Mount Gerizim. At this competing temple, they offered sacrifices similar to the temple in Jerusalem, but also to other gods**

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What Happened Between the Old and New Testament?



Have you ever wondered what separated the Old and New Testaments? Why isn't there just one testament? Maybe you've heard that, during this *Intertestamental Period*, God was silent. If you have more questions than answers, you're in the right place!

The period between Malachi and Matthew is full of history that, if properly understood, can bring some important context to the coming of Jesus. We're going to use the [Believer's Bible Commentary](#) to go in-depth, but **if you just want the highlights, look out for the sentences in bold.**

The Short Answer

The period of silence between the Old and New Testaments is nothing new. It actually follows a pattern God has repeated throughout the Old Testament. First, **God generally designed or allowed a desperate situation to arise** before presenting His deliverance. Secondly, **He always called upon a faithful servant to "stand in the gap,"** making intercession to Him on behalf of the people ([Ezek 22:30](#)), and to be His agent through whom He performed His work.

Most of the Patriarchs and prophets (including [Noah](#), [Abraham](#), [Joseph](#), the [Judges](#), [Esther](#), and [Nehemiah](#)) filled this gap created by humanity's desire to do things their way. **The efforts of man had to be frustrated before divine intervention ensued.** The recorded history of the Intertestamental Period points to a similar experience. It seems that God allowed His people to exhaust their resources and reduce themselves to another desperate situation before He brought to the scene His most faithful and only perfect Servant, His Son Jesus Christ.

The Intertestamental Period: Why Was God Silent?

When God delivered His final message through Malachi, He paused His communications through man *for nearly 400 years*. The book of Malachi was completed in 397 BC, starting this period of silence until the angel's announcement of the birth of John the Baptist in 4 BC ([Luke 1:11-17](#)).

The silence of God gave rise to many theories about His nature. Some might have argued that He was acting as He had always acted. Others might have surmised that man was too sinful to hear God (which is absurd; all sin is an affront to God). Still others might have suggested that man's lack of faith was the cause of God's silence and apparent inactivity.

None of these theories would have taken into account the omniscience and sovereignty of Jehovah God. His determined, covenantal love had already set His course. This long silence was part of His eternal plan. He had spoken on numerous occasions and through various people, but **He was now preparing to speak His greatest and most powerful Word to mankind: Jesus**. A pause — a long and distinct pause — would add emphasis to that monumental revelation.

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The period divides into six historical divisions: the Persian Era (536-336 BC), the Greek Era (336-323 BC), the Egyptian Era (323-198 BC), the Syrian Era (198-165 BC), the Maccabean Era (165-63 BC), and the Roman Era (63-4 BC).

The Persian Era (397-336 BC)

The Persians were the dominating power in the Middle East as far back as 536 BC. God used the Persians to deliver Israel from Babylonian captivity ([Dan 5:30-31](#)). Persia's attitude was tolerant toward the Jewish remnant in Palestine, until internal rivalry over the politically powerful office of high priest resulted in partial destruction of Jerusalem by the Persian governor.

The Babylonian captivity was used by God to purge idolatry from His people, who returned to Jerusalem with a new reverence for the Scriptures and a firm grasp on the theological concept of monotheism. These two influences carried over through the Intertestamental Period. **The rise of the synagogue as the local center of worship happened in the Persian Era**. Scribes became very important for the interpretation of Scriptures in the synagogue services. Towards the end of this era, **a temple rose up in Samaria**, establishing a form of worship that rivaled Judaism. That event **encouraged the ultimate social and religious separation between Jew and Samaritan**.

The Greek Era (336-323 BC)

Alexander the Great, in many respects the greatest conqueror of all time, was the central figure of this brief period. He conquered Persia, Babylon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and western India. Although he died at thirty-three, having reigned over Greece only thirteen years, his influence lived long after him.

Alexander's desire was to found a worldwide empire united by language, custom, and civilization. Under his influence, **the world began to speak and study the Greek language**. This process, called Hellenization, included the adoption of Greek culture and religion in all parts of the world. **Hellenism became so popular that it persisted even into New Testament times**. The struggle that developed between the Jews and Hellenistic influence was long and bitter. Although faithful Jews staunchly resisted polytheism, Greek was common enough to need a Greek translation of the Old Testament.

The Egyptian Era (323-198 BC)

With the death of Alexander in 323 BC, the Greek empire became divided into four segments, which were Daniel's "four kingdoms" that took the place of the "large horn" ([Dan 8:21-22](#)). **Ptolemy Soter received Egypt and soon dominated nearby Israel**. He dealt severely with the Jews at first, but toward the end of his reign and on into the rule of Ptolemy Philadelphus, his successor, the Jews were treated favorably. During this time, the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) became authorized. The policy of toleration followed by the Ptolemies, by which Judaism and Hellenism coexisted peacefully, was very dangerous for the Jewish faith. A gradual infiltration of Greek influence and assimilation of the Greek way of life took place. **Hellenism's emphasis on beauty, shape, and movement encouraged Jews to neglect Jewish religious rites, warping worship to become more external than internal, which had a lasting impact upon Judaism**. 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**). A struggle for power between these two groups resulted in a polarization of the Jews along political, cultural, and religious lines.

The Syrian Era (198-166 BC)

When the Syrians defeated Egypt in the battle of Panion in 198 BC, Judea annexed to Syria. Under the rule of Antiochus the Great and his successor Seleucus Philopater, the Jews, though treated harshly, were nonetheless allowed to maintain local rule under their high priest. All went well until the Hellenizing party replaced the high priest and set off a political conflict that brought Antiochus to Jerusalem. In 168 BC, **Antiochus set about destroying every distinctive characteristic of the Jewish faith**, forbidding sacrifices, circumcision, and observance of the Sabbath and feasts. He also desecrated the Most Holy Place by offering a sacrifice to Zeus.

During this era, the Jewish religion became divided over the issue of Hellenism. The groundwork was laid for an orthodox party, generally led by the scribes and later called the Pharisees, and for what we may call a more pragmatic faction of Jews which became more or less associated with the office of high priest. The pattern of thinking upon which the latter group was based fostered the rise of the Sadducees at a later date.

The Maccabean Era (165-63 BC)

An elderly priest named Mattathias, of the house of Hasmon, lived with his sons in the village of Modein, northwest of Jerusalem. **When a Syrian official tried to enforce heathen sacrifice in Modein, Mattathias revolted**, slew the Syrian official, and fled to the mountains with his family. Thousands of faithful Jews joined him. After the death of Mattathias, three of his sons carried on the revolt in succession: Judas Maccabaeus (166-160 BC), Jonathan (160-142 BC), and Simon (143-134 BC). These men had such success that by 165 BC, **they had retaken Jerusalem**, cleansed the temple, and restored worship. Jews commemorate this event as the Feast of Hanukkah. Finally, under the leadership of Simon, **the Jews received their independence (142 BC)**. They experienced almost seventy years of freedom under the Hasmonaean dynasty.

The most significant religious development resulted from a strong difference of opinion concerning the kingship and high priesthood of Judea. For hundreds of years the position of high priest had taken on obvious political overtones. **Emphasis had not been on the line of Aaron but political strength**, which Orthodox Jews resisted. When John Hyrcanus became governor and high priest of Israel, he conquered Transjordan and Idumaea and destroyed the Samaritan temple. His power and popularity led him to refer to himself as a king. This flew in the face of the orthodox Jews, who by this time were called Pharisees. **They recognized no king unless he was of the lineage of David**, and the Hasmonaean were not. Those who opposed the Pharisees and supported the Hasmonaean were called **Sadducees**.

The Roman Era (63-4 BC)

The independence of the Jews ended in 63 BC, when Pompey of Rome took Syria and entered Israel. Aristobulus II, claiming to be the king of Israel, locked Pompey out of Jerusalem. The Roman leader in anger took the city by force and reduced the size of Judea. In 47 BC, Julius Caesar appointed Antipater the Idumaeen procurator of Judea. **Herod, the son of Antipater, eventually became the king of the Jews around 40 BC.**

Although Herod the Great, as he was called, planned and carried out the building of the new temple in Jerusalem, he was a devoted Hellenist and hated the Hasmonaean family. He killed every descendant of the Hasmonaean, even his own wife Marianne, the granddaughter of John Hyrcanus. Then he proceeded to murder his own two sons. This is the man on the throne when Jesus was born in Bethlehem!

5 notable groups from this era:

1. The Pharisees

- The group was named by John Hyrcanus and means "Separatists".
- Depended heavily upon the scribes and were loyal to the law and religion of God. **Their emphasis upon the strict adherence to the Scriptures sought to apply the written law to everyday life.**
- During the ministry of Jesus, this law was so rigid with legalistic expansions that it usually had little to do with the original intent of Scripture. What started out as a wholesome and needed dependence on the Word of God deteriorated to a formalism and legalism that denied the spirit of the Word.

2. The Sadducees

- Derived their name from the word *Zadokites* or maybe from the Hebrew word *tsaddik*, meaning "righteous".
- While the Pharisees were connected with the scribes, the Sadducees were related to the high priest. **The priests seem to have tended toward the more social, political, and earthly aspects of their position**, which was more attractive to many of the more socially-minded Jewish leaders.

- Belonged mostly to the wealthy influential priestly families who formed the social aristocracy of the Jewish nation. **They felt that God's law and a nation's politics were totally separate.** They were therefore skeptical of the Pharisees and thought of them as old-fashioned, irrelevant, and fanatical.
3. **The Herodians**
 - Emerged during the Roman Era ([Matt 22:16](#)).
 - **A political party whose major aim was to further the cause of Herod's government.** They were perhaps motivated by a fear of the Roman government and the possibility of total destruction that could result from an act of rebellion by the Jews.
 - Strongly inclined toward Hellenism and were opposed to the Pharisees and their constant emphasis on separation.
 4. **The Zealots**
 - "Cananeans" from the Aramaic *kanna'ah*, "zealous" – "Canaanites" in the NKJV New Testament.
 - A political party directly opposed to the Herodians. **They would not conform to Roman rule and did not believe in waiting submissively like the Pharisees** until Israel's Messiah would come and overthrow the Romans. In their opinion, God only helped those who helped themselves, so the Jews had to be ready to fight for independence.
 - **The Zealots had a fiery nationalistic spirit.** The teachings of this group stressed a type of man-made, military deliverance rather than divine intervention.
 5. **The Essenes**
 - Also a product of the Roman Era. Not mentioned in the New Testament but have received considerable attention since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - A religious group – not political.
 - A type of pseudo-spiritual cult which **felt that they must withdraw from ordinary human society** and practice a monastic kind of life and a mystical kind of Judaism.
 - With a passion for the spirit of the law and a separation to God, the Essenes lost all consciousness of the evangelistic mission of Israel. They were content to lock out the world, ignore its problems, and let it die without hope.

The Stage Was Set...

Mankind's futile attempts to deal with the shifting tide of political power and religious belief had produced very little. **Israel was in a kind of spiritual bondage that was even worse than her political bondage.** The rise of various parties and movements discussed above was evidence of a sincere search for some final solution to her problem. All seemed to have failed. The stage of history was dark. The situation was indeed desperate.

Amid this setting **God broke four hundred years of silence** with the announcement of the coming of Christ, the faithful Servant of the Lord, and the Intertestamental Period came to an end.

<https://www.olivetree.com/blog/what-happened-between-old-and-new-testament/>