

The Silent Years

For several years, I read through the Bible in a year or so. I remember during one of my nightly devotions I completed the Old Testament. The following night I turned one page and began my reading of the New Testament. From one page to another, from the Old Testament to the New, I turned the page on almost 400 years of time. For me, the transition was the turn of a page. The historical transition was not so simple.

Bible students refer to the period between the end of the O.T. and the birth of Christ as the "The Silent Years." During that 400 year period, God did not speak His authoritative Word through the prophets. There was no word of hope, comfort, or even judgment. God was silent.

God's people longed for a word from God. They waited for the long expected Messiah to come, just as the Prophets had said. Instead, the Greeks, then the Syrians, and finally the Romans came. Why did God not speak? Certainly people asked, "Will He ever keep His promise of the Deliverer?" And yet, God was silent.

Have you ever been gripped by such thoughts? You know Christians who say, "But, God will never give you more than you can handle." Still you wonder, "How much more hurt and disappointment can I take?" You have been taught if you are faithful and obedient, God will work everything out for His glory and our good. You are still waiting for the good.

You know Christians are called to be people of hope. But, you watch the news, hear the financial forecast, listen to the empty promises, and watch the power politics of Washington and you wonder... "Where is the hope for our children and grandchildren, our nation, and our world?" You know as a Christian that you are called to be more than a conqueror, but sometimes it is the same old struggles and sorrows that conquer us over and over again. Life can be so hard. Life often does not seem fair. God seems to be silent.

It is historically accurate that for over 400 years, God did not speak His Word through the prophets. But, He was far from silent. In truth during what many deem as the "Silent Years," our Sovereign God was doing some of His greatest work, employing some of the most unusual historical people and circumstances to prepare the world for the fullness of time when He would enter into this world.

It was in those 400 years, from the time of Malachi to Matthew that Alexander the Great not only conquered the world, but also imposed his Greek language and philosophy upon the then "known" world. It was in those 400 years that the Roman Empire spread out its vast empire from the East all the way to England. What the Greeks were to philosophy, language, and culture, the Romans were to the pragmatics of "doing" empire. The Romans built roads so efficient that over 2,000 years later many modern roads in Europe are built on top of these Roman roads. Trade routes were so secure that travel and commerce could flow freely throughout the lands governed by Rome. Economic growth was accelerated by a common language coinage. The Romans were simply good and effective at establishing, growing, and maintaining what many consider to have been the greatest empire in human history. While the list of Roman successes and achievements was great, from a Christian's viewpoint, God was setting the stage for the greatest miracle of history.

The most extraordinary thing is that the birth of Christ occurred in a time unlike any other time in ancient history. For this brief period, one man born in an obscure and off-road village could impact the world with a spiritual message which would span the globe. Jesus was born at this time, in this place, never traveled, never created a school, and never founded a religion. Yet, because of the common Greek philosophy, language, epistemology, Roman coinage, road system, process of governance, and imposed Roman peace that covered the known world, God's word went forth. "*In the fullness of time, God sent His Son...*" (Gal. 4:4). All of this took place during the time many of God's people concluded that God was silent.

Be encouraged this Christmas. God may not be working the way we think He should work, but He is working. This Christmas, remember the days when many concluded God was silent, some doubted His promises and prophecies, and others decided to take matters into their own hands. "*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord'*" (Luke 2:10-11). "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe*" (Heb. 1:1-2).

Join with those who sing and pray this Christmas,

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee.*

Great Peace in the Lord,

Eddie