

# 400 Silent Years of God

*They are called the "Four hundred silent years," the time between the old and new testaments; called silent because during that time God gave no new revelation to His people. From Malachi until John the Baptist, the prophetic voice in Israel was silent. There were no prophets, no visions, and no angelic visitations. However, prophetic silence did not indicate that God had forgotten His people. The prediction of these events of world history did occur in Daniel 11:3-6.*

Many significant events occurred in Israel's history during these four centuries:  
The development of the synagogue  
The rise of the Sadducees and Pharisees  
The domination by Rome  
Events bringing about Jewish holiday of Hanukkah (dedication).

King Darius had defeated Babylon in 522 B.C., gaining control over Israel. Now the year was 336 B.C. and the winds of change were beginning to blow. Turbulence swept through the ancient world that would forever shape the history of mankind. Darius III came to the mighty Medo-Persian throne which ruled the world. But of greater significance, another king ascended to a throne in the west. He was Alexander, son of Phillip II, king of the Greek city-state, Macedonia. Though only 20 years of age, Alexander was nothing short of a brilliant commander. The might and wealth of the Persian empire dwarfed his own, but his sheer military genius

enabled him to move with lightning speed against the Persians. (*Daniel 8:5-9,14,22*). In 332 B.C., only some 3 years later, the armies of Alexander the Great defeated Darius III at Issus. By age 30, (325 B.C.) Alexander had conquered all the then-known world from Europe, to Egypt, to the borders of India. True to his teacher, Aristotle, Alexander unified his empire through the cohesive force of Greek culture and religion known as Hellenism. The golden age of the Greek empire, like a shooting star, was brief, lasting but a few short years. At age 33, Alexander the Great died (322 B.C.) an untimely death without an heir, and the rule of his empire was passed to his four generals. They geographically divided the vast Grecian empire into 4 parts with Seleucus ruling Syria and Eastern Asia Minor, Ptolemy ruling Egypt, Lysimachus ruling Thrace and Western Asia Minor (Turkey), and Cassander ruling Macedonia and Greece.

The next two centuries, (approx. 322 B.C. to 171 B.C.), Israel was dominated by Syria, known in Daniel 11 as "*King of the North*" and Egypt also known as "*King of the South*". Because Israel lay between the two nations, it served as a "land bridge" between these two warring nations. In 171 B.C., Antiochus IV (prototype of the Antichrist who is yet to come) rose to the Seleucid throne in Syria. (*Dan 8:8*) He was a very cruel, harsh, and savage man. He believed He was deity in the flesh (he referred to himself as Antiochus Theopiphanes (invisible God).

He tried to unify his rule through assimilation by imposing the Greek

language, thought and religion (Hellenism) upon all as Alexander the Great did. This resulted in 2 political factions in Israel, the orthodox party (Judaism) and the Hellenist party (Hellenism). The orthodox party preferred to be ruled by the Ptolemy's (Egypt) because it did not impose its religion upon the Jews where the Hellenist party was based on Greek philosophy, society, and a religion which deified nature.

In 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes (Syria) warred against Egypt and victory seemed certain. However, the Roman Senate dispatched Popilius Laenas to prevent Antiochus from taking Egypt. When asked if he wished peace or war with Rome, Antiochus stalled for time. The Roman representative drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and stated that he must decide before leaving the circle. Consequently, Antiochus was forced to withdraw from Egypt in great humiliation. On his return north to Syria, Antiochus stopped in Jerusalem. Already in a rage because of Roman interference, he learned that Jason, who had been appointed high priest of the Hellenistic forces, had mounted a rebellion against Menelaus after hearing a rumor of Antiochus death. Antiochus was incensed by this mockery and challenge to his authority. The continued political intrigue within Israel and deep-seated resistance to Hellenization had run its full course with his patience. And so suddenly, without warning, Antiochus ordered his general to destroy Jerusalem. The full heat of his wrath and frustration was vented on the Jewish people. Houses were burned, the

walls of the city were breached, and tens of thousands were killed or sold into slavery.

But it did not stop there. Antiochus turned his attention to the temple on Mount Zion. Syrian soldiers hacked and smashed the porches and gates. They stripped the Temple of its golden vessels and treasures. On Kislev 25, 168 B.C., Antiochus erected an idol of Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek pantheon, on the holy altar in the courtyard. Not surprisingly it bore the face of Antiochus. On the birthday of Zeus (Kislev / December 25), Antiochus offered a pig on the altar. The pig was the ultimate abomination to the Jewish mind, strictly forbidden by the law of God. Antiochus sprinkled its blood in the Holy of Holies and poured its broth over the holy scrolls before he cut them to pieces and burned them. The shock and horror of this left the nation of Israel reeling with severe trauma. The Sanctuary of the Most High had been polluted and profaned, desecrated and defiled.

The Temple was converted to a shrine to Zeus and only swine were permitted for sacrifice. Antiochus issued an edict forbidding the practice of Judaism on pain of death and enforced it by house searches. If Sabbath was observed, or dietary laws kept, or circumcision performed, or scrolls of the law found, the whole family was put to death. Babies were hung around their mothers necks and women thrown from the walls of the cities. The line had been drawn either assimilate or be annihilated.

- continued on reverse -

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## House of Praise International Church

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the power of the Holy Spirit!



Pastor Harlan & Doris Stilwell Snr.

## 400 Silent Years of God

Dark days followed, filled with terror and persecution. The faithful immediately fled to the wilderness or the Judean hills to live in caves. But they were hunted like animals. During that time of intense suffering, thousands sacrificed their lives to remain true to their God.

There were many martyrs. Eleazar, a 90 year old scribe was brought to Antiochus and ordered to eat swine's flesh. Refusing to defile himself and break the law of God. After an eloquent statement of faith, remaining unmoved, the soldiers beat him mercilessly until he died. Another account of a woman, Hannah and her 7 sons, who were arrested and compelled to eat swine's flesh and there assent to the pagan sacrifice. One by one the sons were tortured. After refusing to yield, they were boiled alive in caldrons. One son, refusing to apostatize, had his tongue cut out and hands cut off. As the last son was being pressed by the soldiers to apostatize himself, his mother encouraged him with the word of the resurrection. Finally, the mother was put to death.

**THE MACCABEES**— The untold pain of the Jewish nation continued. Syrian detachments were dispatched throughout the nation to enforce the diabolical plan of Antiochus. An aged priest, named Mattahias was ordered to offer a sacrificial pig to the Greek gods in honor of Antiochus. "Never," he replied with defiance. Instantly an apostate priest approached the altar and requested permission to offer the pig. Everyone knew afterwards they would be forced to

eat the flesh in identification with the offering. Indignation stirred in Mattathias heart and erupted into violence. He ripped the sword from the hand of the Syrian officer and killed him and then killed the apostate priest. His five sons simultaneously engaged and slew the remaining soldiers. Knowing severe retribution would be taken, they and the faithful of the city fled to the hills of Judea, leaving all possessions behind.

And so the revolt began — the Maccabees Revolt—an uprising against the enemies of the one true God.

Each day the faithful band grew as the word of the rebellion spread. Mattathias grew sick and died within one year and leadership was passed to his son Judah ( a wise choice, military genius). He was called the "Maccabee", believed to be from the Hebrew word *makkevet* meaning "hammer". It spoke of the sheer might of his military prowess.

The revolt raged for 3 years. Hiding in caves and lying in ambush, the Maccabees gradually frustrated and wore down the Syrian occupation. Finally the freedom fighters met the enemy in open battle. They secured stunning victories at Beth-horon and Emmaus, opening the road to Jerusalem. They went to Jerusalem and were aghast at the destruction they found, the temple, the walls, the hideous Zeus-idol with Antiochus' face. Weeping the liberators began to cleanse the Sanctuary. It was rebuilt and rededicated on **Kislev 25, 165 B.C. exactly 3 years from its defilement.**