

The time between the Old and New Testaments

Before I start detailing the time between the Testaments here is a summary of the events leading up to it: -

831 BC With the death of king Solomon, the United kingdom of Israel divides into 2 kingdoms, Israel in the north with its capital of Samaria, and Judah, comprising the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin, in the south with its capital of Jerusalem

783 BC The last king of Israel killed with the nation ceasing to exist; taken over by the Assyrians and assimilated into their empire

605 BC onwards The Jews (the people of Judah) are taken into exile by the Babylonians

587 BC Jerusalem captured and the temple destroyed.

539 BC The Babylonian empire defeated by the Persians who extended their empire into Egypt and all of what we now know as Turkey

538 BC The decree of Cyrus of Persia allowed the exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem

537 BC The return of the exiles over a period of 11 years with the temple being rebuilt

The time between the testaments begins with the closure of the book of Nehemiah in about 420 BC; so what happened during the 400 years or so until the opening of the New Testament?

334 BC With the rise of Alexander of Macedonia the expansion of the Persian Empire into Greece was thwarted and Alexander went on to conquer the ancient world as far as India

323 BC Alexander died at the early age of 25 following which his empire was divided between 4 of his generals, with Ptolemy controlling Egypt and Seleucid the eastern empire; culturally the empire, to become known as the Hellenist world, continued as a unity

198 BC The area encompassed by the former united kingdom of Israel until then ruled by Ptolemy fell under Seleucid control, marking a period of persecution of the Jews, the desecration of the temple and outlawing their religion.

166 BC The Jews, however, under Judas Maccabeus revolted and until the coming of the Romans re-established their independence under the Judas dynasty known as the Hasmoneans. Details of this revolt and time are recorded in the Apocrypha **in the books 1 & 2 Maccabees

63 BC The Roman general Pompey took over and the land was then to become known as Palestine; puppet kings were appointed by Rome, one of whom, Herod the Great, brings us to the New Testament period.

7 BC would seem to be the closure of the time between the testaments, with an angel proclaiming in the temple to the elderly priest Zechariah that he was to become the father of John the Baptist – see Luke 1: 5 – 25

6 BC the birth of Christ; this date was established as the likely year as on the transition from BC to AD, meaning Anno Domini – the year of the Lord, it was later found that some years were 'lost'

4 BC Herod the Great died and it is interesting to note that on his death the Holy Family were able to return from Egypt to establish their home at Nazareth in Galilee – see Matthew 2: 10-23.

The Old Testament of 37 books is known as the Hebrew scriptures, but there is another version of an additional 9 books and also additions to the books of Esther and Daniel known as the Septuagint LXX as translated from Hebrew by 70 Egyptian scholars. These additions are known as deuterocanonical or the Apocrypha**. Roman Catholic Christians accept these books as an integral part of the Old Testament and they are included in Catholic bibles, e.g. the Jerusalem Bible, notwithstanding that the word deuterocanonical appears to give them a secondary position. Occasionally passages appear in the Common Lectionary used daily at morning and evening prayer at St Eustachius'. 'Protestant' bibles do not have these books nor additions to Esther and Daniel in their bibles although fuller versions of the New Revised Standard Bible do include them between the Old and New Testament.

With the 4th hundred anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower this year we can reflect and, through historical writings, have knowledge of the considerable changes that have taken place these past 400 years. However, generally the Jews were unaware of the fortunes of their nation during the 400 years or so since the Old Testament, but were waiting for a Messiah, an anointed one to bring their nation back again to the freedom and national identity they experienced under King Solomon. It was unsurprising, therefore, that they flocked to hear John the Baptist, hoping as some did, that he was the promised Messiah – Luke 3: 15. John, as we know, was only the messenger, the forerunner, so I plan to start in next month's magazine a series of articles on the good news of the coming of that Messiah, the anointed one, Jesus Christ, and subsequent events in the New Testament.

Ian Silcox