

INTERMISSION

"The Bible unfolds like a two-act play, with promises given in the Old Testament, then an intermission, and then the New Testament when God's promises are fulfilled," observes pastor-author Colin Smith. God made extraordinary promises and recorded them in the Bible. He has kept them and is keeping them. So you can order your life according to what He has written, by the power of the same Holy Spirit who wrote them down through human authors in their ordinary lives, as part of God's redemptive history.

1- BETWEEN the Testaments. - In Malachi's day, some 400 years before Christ, God's people returned to the land and rebuilt the temple, reestablishing proper worship of God. The exile was also a time of diaspora, as Jews dispersed across the entire ancient world. They were under great challenges to remain pure from pagan influence, as Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi and other prophets reproved them.

Persian rule continued until 331 BC when Alexander the Great conquered the Medo-Persian empire. He was the greatest disciple of Aristotle, protege of Plato, student of Socrates. His purpose was to establish Greek rule and philosophy, the Hellenization of the ancient world. All peoples felt great pressure to adopt Greek ways of life. After his death, Alexander's rule was split between two generals. Under Ptolemy, the Pentateuch was translated into Greek (the Septuagint) in 250BC and the rest of the Old Testament in 130BC, making the Hebrew Scriptures accessible to all peoples across the empire.

2- DESECRATION of the temple. - The Jewish lands came under the rule of the Seleucids in 198BC. In 174BC the ruler called Antiochus Epiphanes "*the manifest god*" particularly promoted Greek culture by burning copies of the Old Testament, prohibiting observance of the Sabbath, and outlawing circumcision. All of these were essential to Jewish identity, so it was one of the most persecuted periods of Jewish history. It climaxed in 167BC when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, by setting up a statue of the Greek god Zeus and sacrificing pigs to it (prophecied in Daniel 11:31). The high priest and his sons mounted a revolt. Under Judas Maccabeus "*the hammerer*" they conquered large Seleucid armies. In 146BC they rededicated the temple to proper worship of God, which Jews still observe as the Feast of Hanukkah, to celebrate God's miraculous intervention.

The Maccabeans established the Hasmonean dynasty, in which the kings took the office of High Priest. This led to reactions from a diverse range of religious-political parties of Jews which continued to New Testament times. This included Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and others, and the Essene community at Qumran, who understood Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in their midst, but mistakenly expected a final war to destroy God's enemies. From them we get the Dead Sea Scrolls, important to corroborate ancient copies of Scripture and affirming God's preservation of His Word.

3- ENTER the Romans. - The rulers became increasingly corrupt, immoral, dictatorial. The Jewish leaders asked the Romans to kick them out, and in 63BC general Pompey conquered Jerusalem. Herod The Great was then made king. An Idumean, he was also a Jewish proselyte, and responsible for rebuilding the glory of the temple. He ruled from 37BC to 4BC and was king when Jesus was born.

Understanding this intertestamental history gives us a picture of the world into which God's promises came to fruition, as they unfolded in the gospel accounts of Luke, Matthew, Mark, and John. During those 400 years, God was not speaking through His prophets because no new revelation was needed. The Scriptures already given were pertinent to their situation, as they are for us today as we wait for God's plan to unfold. That's why God's people seek to follow His principles in every aspect of our lives.

4- ORDER YOUR LIFE according to God's written Word. - The Scriptures were written and preserved to instruct God's people in His truth, and for encouragement to endure the trials that we face (Romans 15:4, 1Corinthians10:11, 2Timothy 3:14-18). The Bible teaches us His truth, reproves us to show how we are wrong, corrects us to go the proper way, and trains us in righteousness, to walk in His ways according to His Word, all by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

This is why the Word of God is the centerpiece of Christian services, so that we worship God in praises, prayers, and preaching, all which conform to God's written-down Word of truth and grace. And so that we do not conform to the culture of the pagan societies which surround us, but rather live so that God's truth transforms our thinking, our believing, and our behaving. So that we conform to the image of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who is the personal Living Word fulfillment of all of God's promises.

5- YOU CAN BE CERTAIN. - God wrote and preserved His redemptive history, God's Word written down. That's why Christians insist on reading and studying the Bible, meditating, memorizing, but most of all living it out in humble obedience. Every day, including personal and family devotions, and training children to understand the Bible. In order to believe and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, growing in grace, and spreading the Good News to all. Like Theophilus, you too can have certainty concerning the things you are taught. As you trust and obey God's Word, by His power within, you will experience His life-transforming truth and grace - and you will share it with others, as He instructs! □