

Exiles: The Promise

Malachi 3:1, 4:6; Mark 1:1-5; 1 Peter 3:19-22; Mark 13:1-2; Ephesians 4:17-24; 1 Peter 2:1-12

In this series, we have been tracing the theme of exile through the Old Testament story of the family of Israel and how through exile, we can find our true home. If you have missed any of the messages, go to the website and listen.

Last week, we saw two groups of Israelites under the rule of Persia. There were some who stayed in Persia and there were some who returned to Jerusalem. Those returning to Jerusalem were looking for a home by trying to rebuild what once was instead of looking to God to do something new. In fact, God seemed to have gone silent all together.

God's Silence: The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi. The last verse of this book (Malachi 4:6) says *"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."*

Then we see nothing. There were 400 years of God's silence...no prophets, no communication. However, in true God fashion, He leaves them with this hope, *"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.*" (Malachi 3:1)

(Who was this messenger who will prepare the way for God to carry out His plan? It was John the Baptist.)

400 Years is a long time to wait on a promise, and a lot happened to the Israelites during that time. Let's look at some history.

- 430 BC – Malachi is written
 - This was during the reign of the Persians, the powerful nation that God led to show favor to the Jews.
 - The Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, rebuild their temple, and continue sacrifices to their God.
 - During this time the Jews experienced peace and a hands-off approach from the nation ruling them.
- 333 BC – Greeks Defeat the Persians
 - This victory, led by Alexander the Great, ushered in an era of growing Greek influence all around the Israelites.
 - The Jews still had freedom to worship, and relative peace, but many of them grew tired of waiting for God to act and began to mix their religion with worship of the Greek gods.
- 214 BC – Seleucid Dynasty Control
 - This continued the reign of the Greeks all through the area, but a different dynasty was in control of Israel.
 - The leader, Antiochus IV, persecuted the Jews and forbade the practice of Judaism.
 - He forced the people to worship Greek gods and ordered the destruction of Jewish scriptures.
 - These regulations went too far, and as a result many Jews were no longer willing to accept this heavy-handed Greek rule.

- This culminated in the next important event.
- 167 BC – Maccabean Revolt
 - The Maccabeans (followers of Maccabeus) were the group of Jews who were tired of the assimilation of the Jews into Greek culture and were ready to be free from the controlling grip of the Greeks.
 - Judah Maccabee led the rebellion that overthrew the Greek rulers.
 - This entire period, recorded in the first book of Maccabees, ushered in what is known as the Hasmonean Dynasty when the Jews were once again allowed more autonomy.
 - Hanukkah is a celebration of the beginning of this revolt.
 - Re-dedication of the 2nd Temple (built by Zerubbabel)
- 63 BC – Romans Invaded Jerusalem
 - This marked the turn in power from the Greeks to the Romans, and again led to many years of shakeup around Jerusalem.
 - Eventually Herod the Great, an Idumean (descendant of Esau, the family line God rejected) gained power over God's people in Israel and was still in control when Jesus was born.
 - He was the ruler who tried to have Jesus killed by drowning all baby boys
 - Parallel to the Pharaoh's order to kill all the baby boys in Egypt. (Moses)

Same Old Thing...Yet New: The Israelites once again find themselves living in exile when the Romans invaded Jerusalem. However, through all of this exile, and waiting on God, there was a group of people who were still believing and waiting on God's Promise.

God wasn't taking his time because he didn't care, God was taking his time because he was **positioning** himself to be in the right place and time to **preserve** his relationship with humanity. God was planning to come back to a temple, but it wasn't the traditional temple that the Israelites had built. It was a new thing: His followers would become God's temple.

A Voice in the Wilderness: Read Mark 1:1-5. (Side note: The miraculous birth of John (Zachariah and Elizabeth) should remind us of the miraculous birth of Isaac (Abraham and Sarah))

Why was John the Baptist baptizing people? What was the point? He was preparing people's hearts for what Jesus would do. God would be making His new home in people's hearts, not in temples.

Read 1 Peter 3:19-22 John the Baptist does what he is supposed to do and prepares people's hearts for Jesus.

The Veil is Torn: In Matthew 27, when Jesus breathed his last breath, the veil of the temple was torn in two. The separation between God and man was gone.

In Mark, Jesus even predicts that the temple that they had rebuilt would be destroyed. *Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!* And Jesus said to him, *“Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* (Mark 13:1-2)

Why is this important and what does it have to do with exile? Think about all of the other times people have been in exile. What was the one thing that kept getting destroyed? The temple.

Why is that significant? That is where the people could connect with God. So when the temple was destroyed, people were not only exiled from their place or their purpose, but they were separated from their God.

But God was up to something new. The torn veil was a sign that God was no longer operating in a physical space any more, but instead was operating in us. Read Ephesians 4:17-24.

Exile Today: You and I are still in exile but it is different. We are strangers living in a foreign land. It's not a physical location or physical battle. It's a spiritual location and battle. God found a way to *invert* our exile.

Christ came as a child and lived a life as an exile, showing us how to exist in a foreign land. You and I now have a choice about what kind of exile we will live in.

It's easy to exist in the world if you follow the rules of the world. If you live truly in the physical world and don't follow God, you will feel right at home. Everything that happens will feel normal. But when we choose to follow God, we enter into exile. Not as a punishment, but as a promise of a better future. Not just for us, but for everyone.

It is our choice. Are we going to live as exiles away from God's presence (belonging to this world) or are we going to live as exiles of the world (belonging to God's Kingdom)?

How do we live as exiles? (Tree of Life) Read 1 Peter 2:1-12.

Discussion Questions:

- The 400 years of God's silence had to be difficult and disheartening. Many fell away from following Him.
 - Have you ever felt as if God was silent in your life or a situation?
 - How did you handle it?
 - Do you feel God was actually silent or was it your lack of listening?
 - Looking back, could/should you have handled it differently?