

## The Four Silent Centuries

[Originally delivered at the Winnebago Pastoral Conference, Western Wisconsin District, Evangelical Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States held at St. John, Markesan, Wisconsin, February 14-15, 1944]

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The general purpose of this paper, as I understand it, is to discuss the period lying between the Old and New Testaments. When we turn from the last page of Malachi to the first page in Matthew, we pass over some four hundred years with the turn of the page. Only the divine continuity of Holy Scriptures enables us to bridge so large a gap without serious loss to content or thought. There are, however, questions and problems which do arise when one plunges into the New Testament—questions whose answers alone are found in the four silent centuries between the Testaments. Many of the New Testament customs and institutions can only be understood in the light of the preceding era. As we pass from Malachi to Matthew, we are suddenly confronted with such words as Synagogue, Sanhedrin, Pharisee, Scribe, Sadducee, the Tradition of the Elders, all unexplainable by any study of the Old Testament. There are new, strangely sounding names: Caesar Augustus, Herod, Pilate, Galatia, Corinth, Rome, none of which has any significance whatsoever to the reader of the Old Testament. There is the startling change in language itself from Hebrew to Greek, and with that change in language there comes a host of new ideas, new conceptions, new modes of expression, new references. And the key to all this newness must be found between the Testaments, if it is to be found at all. Should we, for example, begin with the writings of Martin Luther and then pass directly over to the Lutheran publications of 1944 without knowing anything about the intervening period, we would find ourselves at an incalculable loss. The contentions of today, the passionate accusations, the vehement denials, the solemn warnings would then appear to us as so much beating of the wind. There is, naturally, a fundamental difference in the Word of God which dare not be overlooked. The basic truths of Genesis coincide with those of Revelation, and there is an inner unity between the two Testaments which remain undisturbed, whether we know the Jewish history between Malachi and Matthew or not. We do not suggest, therefore that a study of this period from Malachi to Matthew is essential or even very valuable for an understanding of New Testament doctrine, except for an exegete interested in the development of the Greek tongue. Our discussion will point mainly toward New Testament externals, customs, institutions, side issues, backgrounds in so far as these have their roots and developed in the period to be considered.

There is one other matter that should be mentioned: that is the source of our information. Any thorough study of this period would have to start with the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Babylonian Talmud, the Mishnah, and similar related Jewish writings. Then there are the works of such men as Josephus, Philo, Strabo, and Eusebius. The secular historians of Rome and Greece are of little or no help when it comes to Jewish history except for the fact that the destiny of the little Jewish community was an integral part in the rise and fall of the mighty Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. My sources of information were mainly modern works, based more or less on these original authorities. I shall quote freely throughout the discussion and take credit only for the arrangement and selection of material most suitable for our particular purpose. Needless to say, I cannot vouch for the authenticity of any material not coming directly from Old Testament Books. So much by way of introduction.

Most of you will probably recall the main *political developments* taking place during this period. With the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. the Jewish political state had come to an end, never to be revived again except for a short time under the Maccabees. Had Israel merely been a race like others, it could never have survived. Its capital was destroyed; its homeland overrun by neighboring tribes; its leading families exiled to a distant land. But Israel was more than a race; it was the bearer of God's promise. God had not called Abram out of Babylon, only to let Abram's descendants return to Babylon. Hardly had the Jews settled down on the banks of the Euphrates, when God allowed a new figure to carry out His plans. That man was Cyrus, the greatest figure in oriental ancient history. In twelve years Cyrus destroyed forever three great empires, conquered all of Asia, and secured for his race the dominion of the world for some two centuries. With Cyrus the control over Asia passed from the Semitic to the Indo-Germanic races, and from that day unto the present God has enlarged the descendants of Japheth.

We are all aware as to how Cyrus was used in the restoration of Jerusalem. There comes to mind such names as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is a story of heartache and tragedy for the handful of Jews that returned to Palestine. It is also a story with several significant developments. For one thing, the Babylonian exile must have cured the Jews once and for all as far as their former inclinations toward idolatry were concerned. The idea of one true God had been burned deeply into the Jewish soul, and coarse idolatry was a thing of the past. Another development to be noticed in this period of reconstruction under the Persian regime has to do with the High Priests. Before the destruction of Jerusalem the leading role in the Jewish national state had long been played by the kings of Judah and Israel. But with the end of Jewish political independence we find the High Priest assuming this role of leadership, and from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah right on down to the final destruction of Jerusalem the High Priests retained their influence with but few interruptions. Moreover, it was at this time that the house of Zadok came into prominence, for, as Ezekiel tells us, only the descendants of Zadok were to have priestly rights after the restoration, largely because of their faithfulness before the exile. We mention this because already under the Persians there are signs of two distinct groups among the Jews: the priestly house of Zadok, from whom the Sadducees took their name, and a new group later known as the Pharisees. The main point of distinction at this time seems to have centered around an argument concerning oral tradition.

It was a Hebrew belief that Moses, upon Sinai, received not only certain laws which he wrote down, but likewise a second revelation interpreting the first and containing also additional precepts. When he descended from the mount, it was said that he summoned Aaron, to whom he gave first the tablets, and then recited the later, more complete communication, known as the oral Law. This oral Law, handed down from father to son, later was also preserved in written form and was held in undiminished respect by the nation in general. A minority of the nation, in the days following the time of Ezra, neglected the oral code, declaring that duty was fulfilled by observing the regulations of the written Law. Such observance made men worthy of the title "Zadikim," or the righteous. Those who added to the observance of the written Law that of the traditional or oral Law took the name "Chasidim," or the pious, accounting themselves to be more holy. The names Sadducee and Pharisee were not yet known, and the cleavage as yet was not very noticeable, but the seeds of dissension were already present.

Still another development took place under Persian rule which should be noted. While in far off Greece, Athens and Sparta were girding themselves for the coming Peloponnesian Wars, the Persian king's cupbearer, named Nehemiah, received the grant as Persian governor in Judea. To Nehemiah goes the honor of finally establishing and consolidating the Jewish community as

it was to exist until the days of Christ. It was through Nehemiah's efforts that the book of the law was read before a solemn assembly of the Jews, resulting in the acceptance of a public agreement promising strict observance of the Sabbath, absolute prohibition of mixed marriages, keeping of the sabbatical year with its remission of debts, and, above all, faithful payment of dues for the temple service. This event, taking place in the year 444 B.C., is often given as the real birthday of Judaism, though not all was accomplished at this assembly. Many priests who had established their own nobility were lukewarm toward Nehemiah's reforms, and, when Nehemiah's twelve-year leave expired and he had to return to the Persian court, the Sabbath was again boldly desecrated, the temple tribute was neglected, and mixed marriages recurred. Even the High Priest's grandson had married the pagan daughter of Sanballat, Nehemiah's chief adversary. But Nehemiah, knowing conditions, had managed to secure the governorship anew and he returned to Palestine, going about the whole country, hunting out mixed marriages, punishing violations of the Sabbath rest, closing the gates of Jerusalem every Friday evening, and rigorously collecting tithes for the temple. When the High Priest's grandson was expelled from the people and from the congregation, a number of other dissatisfied priests joined him, determine to establish their own form of Jewish worship. This became the religious community of the future Samaritans, centering about a temple to be built on Mount Gerizim in Samaria. It made an advantageous clear-cut division: the hesitating elements were always free to join the Samaritans, and the strict, reform party dominated in Jerusalem.

We know nothing regarding the length of Nehemiah's second term, but his work was done. He had stamped his spirit upon Judaism for all time. It is one of the most striking evidences of the wonderful ways which God takes for attaining His ends that final completion and permanent consolidation of exclusive Judaism which sealed itself against everything non-Jewish and rejected sternly everything heathen, was made possible only under the protection and by the aid of a heathen government. But for the God-directed energy of Nehemiah the whole history of the Jewish people might have run a different course. Now, however, God's Chosen People were once again established in and about Jerusalem, and the stage was set for the next great scene. Bit by bit events were shaping up which, taken all together, would constitute the long-awaited fullness of time.

It must have been with a great deal of apprehension that the Jews in Jerusalem heard of the approach of Alexander the Great. Already he had destroyed Tyre and Sidon, and the Persian armies had been hopelessly defeated. There was nothing to bar Alexander from destroying Jerusalem a second time, nothing, that is, but the will of God. And, as we know, God had other plans in mind for Alexander. Instead of persecuting the Jews, Alexander proved friendly, showing all possible consideration for the religious views of his subjects. It was the dawn of a new era for Judaism, the real beginning of the dispersion. Up to this time the Jews had been living in two central areas: Palestine and Babylon, by far the larger number in Babylon. Now scores of Greek cities were thrown open to Jewish colonists, and the Jews swarmed in all directions, lured by the promise of freedom and fortune.

For almost 200 years the Greeks held political control over Palestine. For approximately one century the Greek Ptolemies of Egypt ruled Palestine. The Egyptian administration turned out to be most favorable for the Jews, and the mild, kindly disposed Greek rulers of Egypt even encouraged the Jews to settle in Egypt proper a far cry from the days of Moses. It is even reported that Alexander colonized Jews in his new city Alexandria. At any rate, the successors of Alexander pursued this policy with all energy, because, as Josephus informs us, the Jews were the only ones among all their subjects upon whose oath the rulers could absolutely depend.

Hence, the Jews had positions of highest trust, and were granted complete equality even with the Macedonians, a privilege called isopolity. Alexandria soon became the second Jewish city in the world, and in Egypt the Jews were numbered by the millions.

It wasn't long before the Greek rulers of Syria, called the Seleucidae, also catered to the good will of the Jews, hastening to grant the Jews in Syria the same privileges by also giving them isopolity with the Macedonians and Greeks. It was of course, just another case of power politics, as the Jews were soon to learn from bitter experience.

Hardly had the Syrian kings wrested control over Palestine from the Egyptian Ptolemies when the Jews found themselves locked in a life-and-death struggle with the Syrian ruler. It was in the year 176 B.C. that the Mad Man Antiochus IV became ruler in Syria, and he immediately became absorbed in a gigantic plot to weld all the Greek-speaking peoples into one vast Pan-Hellenic federation and overthrow the power of Rome. Part of his plan was the Hellenization of all subject people, notably the Jews. Rome, already a power in Eastern affairs, stopped the plot, but Antiochus vented his wrath upon the stubborn Jews. At the first excuse he marched into Jerusalem, looted the temple, prohibited on pain of death all sacrifices, divine services, observance of the Sabbath, and destroyed every copy of Scriptures that could be found. A small altar to Zeus was set up in the temple on the sacred altar of burnt offering, and swine were sacrificed on the altar as a crowning insult to Jehovah. It is to this sacrilege that quite a few of the modern critics refer the Book of Daniel and his "abomination of desolation." Without going into the details of bloodshed and martyrdom that followed, it is sufficient to mention that the Jews soon sprang into open revolt, headed by the humble but fanatically brave family of the Maccabees.

Under the eighty-year reign of the Maccabees the Jews enjoyed their last brief period of independence. Not only did the Maccabees restore the national life of the Jews, extending the boundaries to the limits of the Davidic empire and bringing Galilee once more under Jewish control, but they attempted to restore the ancient religion. In the latter task we again find the "Chasidim" or pious helping to check heathenism and restore the pure Hebrew faith. These "Chasidim" were not so much interested in the political fortunes of the Maccabees as they were in strict obedience to the law of Moses. And when in later years the Maccabees violated that law by taking over the priesthood, the "Chasidim" withdrew their support and received the name "Perushim" or Separatists—the Pharisees of New Testament times. Over against the Pharisees or "Chasidim" we now also find the Sadducees, the hereditary priesthood, a group of wealthy, autocratic, worldly-minded men, who welcomed the Hellenic culture, were natural diplomats, more interested in politics than religion. Still another group that should be mentioned at this time were the Essenes, Jews inclined toward monasticism, living in communities near the Dead Sea, looking with favor on celibacy, often specialists in the arts of healing. Finally, this period under the Maccabees also saw the formation of the Sanhedrin, named and formed after the model of Greek-city governments. In this body Pharisees and Sadducees sat together in council.

Thus, the Sanhedrin was ready, the Pharisees and Sadducees were ready, the High Priest was ready—all that was needed yet was a Pontius Pilate. And his way was prepared in the year 63 B.C. when Pompey carried the Roman Eagles into Palestine, putting an end to the deteriorating Maccabean regime. Concerning the fifty odd years of Roman rule preceding the birth of Christ, little need be said. Roman influence made itself felt in Palestine as in other parts of the empire in two main aspects: the well-developed system of laws and courts and the intensive program of building and construction. Under Herod, appointed King of the Jews, Palestine was transformed with roads, aqueducts, forts, cities, palaces, and a magnificent, new

temple at Jerusalem—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Peace had once more descended over the land of Palestine. Along the Sea of Galilee men were once more washing their nets. In Samaria women could once more safely walk out to the wells. In Jerusalem the priests once more took turns burning incense. And out at Bethlehem the shepherds once more watched their flocks by night.

That concludes the first part of the topic. I have tried to present a brief political survey of the period under consideration, realizing that such a chronological report, though necessary, is of little value or instruction in itself. We have barely touched upon the really important, living side of history, that side represented by the rise and development and clash and fall of spiritual forces, forces not found out on the battlefield but in men's minds. In this realm lie the motives behind man's action, and here lies the key which alone will open the door to any appreciable understanding of history.

The history of the Jews between the Old and New Testaments saw the rise of two distinct spiritual forces. The one, commonly known as *Eastern Judaism*, had its origin in Babylon. The other, called Western Judaism, reached its highpoint in Alexandria. Since there were great differences between the two, it is important that we examine each in detail. We return, therefore, to Babylon, the city of Nebuchadnezzar and the favorite home of Cyrus the Persian.

Although all the Jews could have returned to Palestine under the lenient rule of the Persians, it is noteworthy that only a handful of not more than 50,000 availed themselves of the opportunity. The vast majority of Jews, the wealthiest and most influential, remained where they were—not only in Babylon but spreading out, north to the Black and Caspian Seas, south to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, east to India and central Asia. The Babylonian Talmud refers to Jews living both in Arabia and India, and in the past century archeologists were constantly finding pottery and inscriptions of Jewish origin throughout this whole area. The Apostle Paul no doubt also spent his Arabian sojourn among Jewish colonies. The Jews of the East were numbered in the millions, and Babylon was the center. Nor was this so strange. Babylon had been the cradle of culture for some 3000 years. It possessed vast libraries on science, law, philosophy, medicine and mathematics. Babylon was a place of learning, and as such it must have had a great appeal to the Jews.

As might be expected, however, one of the first effects which life in the Babylon-Persian empire had upon the Jews was in the line of business. It seems that the Jews quickly established themselves in various fields of trade, soon controlling various caravan and shipping concerns. The Jews even had two fortified treasure cities for Jews exclusively where their hoarded wealth was stored. It is quite likely that the Jews even became a formidable political factor in the affairs of the East through their racial exclusiveness and inner unity. But the thoughts and sentiments of the Jews were still centered in Jerusalem, and the passage in Daniel "with his windows open toward Jerusalem" could well be descriptive of the spiritual attitude of millions of Jews. The relation between Babylon and Jerusalem was very close. A Jewish messenger could make the journey in eight days by camel. The priestly hierarchy of Jerusalem remained in closest correspondence with the leading Jews of Babylon. Even the hours of the feasts and fasts as celebrated in Jerusalem were telegraphed to Babylon by means of fire signals across mountain and desert.

The spiritual supremacy within Judaism, however, remained in Babylon, not in Jerusalem. There were several reasons for this. In Babylon the Jews claimed to be of purer descent, representing a more undiluted Judaism than the brethren in Palestine. Their genealogies were kept with meticulous accuracy so complete and detailed that, if put together, as the leaders

claimed, they would have constituted enough loads for several hundred camels. Moreover, the Hebrew tongue gradually came into disuse throughout the East, giving place to Aramaic both in Babylon and in Palestine. But it was among the Babylonian scholars that Hebrew was retained in its original purity. Finally, the wealth and leisure of the Babylonian Jews coupled with the stimulus of the literary atmosphere of Babylon soon made the Babylonian Jews the greatest Hebrew scholars in Judaism. It was in Babylon that the greatest theologians were found, the best-equipped schools, and most widely known seminaries.

The most influential and important group among the Babylonian Jews were the Scribes. The Scribes seem to have existed already in the days of Josiah when they seem to have been custodians and teachers of the Law of Moses. With the Exile and destruction of the temple they very likely came to equality with the priests, whose functions were temporarily curtailed. At first they devoted themselves to the gathering and preserving of the laws and ceremonies, and Ezra might be mentioned as a, shining example. In the following centuries there were Scribes in both Palestine and Babylon, but it was in Babylon that they reached their highest development.

Their first function was that of scholars, copying and editing the Law of Moses. They were skilled professional bookmen, and to them is credited the change from the archaic Hebrew alphabet to the later square characters. Continuing as editorial revisers, correcting, combining, harmonizing the texts of the Law, they soon expanded into the field of interpretation, and exposition. Then, as many unwritten legal traditions grew up, they also became the custodians of these unwritten laws. And, as the change in environment and life created many problems for which there was no rule either in written or oral law, by means of exegeses often artificial, the Scribes deduced new rules to fit new cases. Nor was this all. Not satisfied with creating new laws by means of devious exegesis, they busied themselves creating ordinances for every conceivable case that might occur, thus, "putting a hedge about the Law" and guarding against every possible infraction. Hence, from being merely copyists, then interpreters of the Law, they became themselves legislators. This process went on for centuries until these collected laws, interpretations, traditions, precedents, and decrees of the Scribes were finally collected in what was known as the Mischna. The chief interest of all these Scribal activities was in sacrifices, purifications, foods, tithes, and ceremonial aspects of the Law. For its ethical elements there seemed to have been little concern.

The second function of the Scribes was as teachers. The fame of their scholarship attracted large numbers of earnest, studious young men, whom the Scribes trained in memorization and repetition of both written and oral Law, much as the Mohammedan colleges of today in Cairo and other Near East centers train their students to repeat the Koran. They sternly insisted upon absolute and literal memorization. Upon the Scribes in this capacity during the first century B.C. was given the title of "Rabbi" or master. In these academies the Scribes also turned their attention from purely legal matters to the historical, doctrinal side of Scriptures which they amplified and embellished with legends, allegories, and parables. To this was given the name "Haggada." Finally, both Mischna, with its laws, precedents, and traditions, and Haggada, with its legends, allegories, and parables, were united in what is known as the Babylonian Talmud.

There is little information regarding their third function as jurists or judges, but in the New Testament this three-fold function seems clearly defined. From their activity as scholars they are merely called Scribes, as teachers they are called doctors of the law, and as jurists they are called lawyers.

From the days of the Maccabees the Scribes were so closely connected with the Pharisees that we find the New Testament almost constantly referring to them in the phrase "Scribes and

Pharisees” so that it would seem they were practically one. The Scribes were simply professional men who could at the same time be Pharisees, whereas the Pharisees drew their members from all classes and fields of activity.

Thus, as we survey the Scribe’s growth from obscurity to supreme legal authority in later Judaism, it is easy to see how the Scribe was held in highest esteem, far above even the wealthiest merchant-prince. In the Talmud it is said that the Scribe was honored of God, praised by the angels, and would hold the highest rank in heaven. To the academies of these learned Scribes or Rabbi students flocked from all parts of the Jewish world to sit at the feet of the great Scribes with awe and veneration, eagerly looking forward to the hour when men might call them “Rabbi.” The wealthy families coveted this high honor for their sons, and the Book of Acts reveals such ambition in a family of Tarsus for their son Saul.

Another segment of Jewish society during and after the Exile is represented by a group later known as the Pharisees. Little is known regarding the religious life of the Jewish community during the Exile, but some conclusions may be drawn. During this period when the temple was gone it is reasonable to suppose that we have the beginning of the synagogue. And in the services of the synagogues it seems that the Levites were particularly outstanding in the art of music and song, as was the case already before the Exile. Thus, also when Nehemiah and Ezra called the great assembly in Jerusalem for the reading of the Law, it was the Levites who stood beside Ezra to open with prayer and song. It further appears that it was especially the Levites who sponsored and upheld the oral or traditional Law, receiving, therefore, the name “Hasidim” or pious. But it was primarily as men of prayer and song that the Hasidim emerged in the days after the Exile, and, the art of public or common prayer became a conspicuous part of postexilic devotions, so that the extra canonical books of this period are filled with such prayers. It is recorded that a later member of this group, a certain Onias, had a ditch drawn around him when he prayed, and was, therefore, called the “Circle-Drawer,” being credited with the power of invoking rain from heaven. Many such traditions of these wonder-working Hasidim are said to be found in the Talmud. Daniel is often mentioned as a type of the true Hasidim who prayed three times daily. At any rate, it was undoubtedly due to the Hasidim that the synagogues later on accepted the practice of 18 daily and 7 Sabbath “benediction,” which are not brief sentences but elaborate and stately prayers. And all of us will recall the Hasidim, then known by another name, who prayed so elaborately before Christ while the publican not only confessed his sinfulness but also his lack of training in public prayer.

To this group we also credit a strict observance of both written and traditional Law, and that, of course, led to a close association between Hasidim and Scribes. Under the Syrian reign, 198-143 B.C., the Hasidim and Scribes organized into a separate group called “The Assembly of the Hasidim” and aided the Maccabees over against the irreligious practices of the Hellenistic elements in Jerusalem. But, as we have mentioned before, when the Maccabees assumed the high priesthood and made political power their aim, the Hasidim withdrew their support. This act led their Sadducean enemies to give them the scornful nickname of “Perushim” or “Separatists” which name in slightly altered form as “Pharisee” they bore throughout history so that in time the name Hasidim disappeared. Besides their fanatical devotion to matters of written and traditional law, the Pharisees emphasized the providence of God and the hope of a resurrection over against the rationalistic, materialistic viewpoint of the Sadducees.

In later years the Pharisee became a separatist not so much from heathenism and Hellenism as from the common people. His scrupulous observance of the Law ignored its essentials for the externals. He tithed the smallest seeds and forgot justice and mercy. He lost his

passion for divine concepts of right and wrong and became a formalist and a casuist. The whole movement had degenerated by the time of Christ, but it had not always been so. The Pharisees played a very important and sometimes very praiseworthy part in the bitter struggle of preserving the Jewish religion from utter loss and destruction.

That will give us some idea as to the outstanding qualities developed under the guidance of Eastern Judaism.

Although Alexander the Great was thwarted by God in his dreams of an immense Pan-Hellenic empire, Alexander did set in motion forces more powerful than his best-trained armies; the forces of that amazing Greek culture which still is active today. These were forces of the mind, spiritual forces, unseen, but so irresistible that the tongues of half a world were changed in less than a century. Even mighty Rome bowed before the Greek ideas, and Roman philosophers, Roman historians, Roman artists sat humbly at the feet of proud Greek scholars. The forces of Greek civilization were everywhere at work. Greek city governments became the models for a thousand communities. Greek gymnasiums, Greek stadiums, Greek theaters furnished the amusement for all the vast masses. Greek literature and Greek art became the standard for all the scholars. And Greek philosophy became the despair and the acme of perfection for all the learned.

When the Jews swarmed out into this newly formed world, it was a Greek world wherever they went. Slowly but steadily this constant Greek influence had its effect upon even the Jews. Where this process went on long enough, there developed what became known as Western Judaism. And nowhere was this more apparent than in the city of Alexandria.

Alexandria was the meeting point of three continents: Africa, Asia, Europe. To its great harbors came men and treasures from all over the world. It was indeed a great commercial city, second only to Rome in size. Its streets were crowded with the endless stream of traffic. Its market places echoed with the noise of men and animals. Here were districts which thrived on dissipation and revelry. Here was the great Museum with its priceless collection of ancient treasures. Here was the great library, later burned, with half a million papyrus rolls, containing all the wisdom and foolishness of centuries of human effort. Even as Alexandria was Rome's rival as the commercial giant of the day, so Alexandria was Athen's rival as the intellectual mistress of the time. To that we might add that Alexandria was the rival of both Jerusalem and Babylon as the Jewish center of the world.

And here as in Babylon the Jews quickly showed their aptitude and superiority in matters relating to business and finance. So wealthy did the Alexandrian Jews become that they could list Roman emperors as their debtors, and the Jewish synagogue in Alexandria was the proud boast of all Judaism. So huge was this structure that attendants had to devise signals to indicate the time of responses for those sitting at the rear.

But it was inevitable that the Jews in Alexandria would be affected by the spell of Greece. It is true that the Jews at first could withdraw themselves into their own narrow circles, upheld by their love of the Law of Moses, their natural exclusiveness, and the pride of race. And within these circles they could speak with bitter contempt of the vain, empty heathen idolatry of the pagans about them. But they couldn't stay within these circles. Their business, their livelihood prevented that. When they walked through the streets, they heard nothing but Greek. Before long they themselves were forced to use the Greek language to carry on their trade. In the short space of half a century they had lost their own language so precious to them and were speaking nothing but Greek. And once they had learned the Greek language, they could not avoid Greek culture. Among the more learned names like Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno became



known, and in the libraries they couldn't help but run across men like Homer, Aeschylus, Pindar, Aristophanes, and a host of others.

And if the older men did turn away from these Greek influences with a frown, there was no way of closing the eyes and ears of the younger people. Before long the great chariot races were attended by Jews, and the Dionysian festivals and other pagan celebrations had all the drawing power of our modern Hollywood extravaganzas. Bit by bit, step by step the process went on—in spite of warnings, in spite of pleas, in spite of reform, until the Jew of Alexandria was a strange mixture of Hellenism and Hebrewism, until the Jew of Alexandria became what is known as the Western Jew.

The first step in this transformation was, of course, the adoption of the Greek language. That was followed, naturally enough, by the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek—later called the Septuagint. The translation, sponsored by the Greek ruler of Egypt who wanted a copy of every sacred scripture in his library, included, incidentally, some of the Apocryphal Books, which rejected by the Jews in general, as far as canonicity was concerned, but taken into the Vulgate later on and accepted by the Western Church. The Septuagint, in itself, was of great benefit not only for the Jews of Alexandria but for most of the Jews in all sections of the world. Though Aramaic was used by the Jews of Palestine and Babylon, Greek was also spoken and understood. Thus, the Septuagint became the most-widely circulated Bible of the average Jew and is constantly quoted by the writers of the New Testament.

The final stage in the Hellenization of the Western Jew was the combining and diffusing of Greek thoughts with the truth of Scripture. Numerous literary works serve as testimony to this fact. And this entire development culminated in a man named Philo, an accomplished scholar of both the Greek culture and Jewish learning. His writing was the greatest literary product of Hellenistic, Western Judaism and became famous throughout the Jewish world. Philo became the founder of a new movement. His philosophy was immensely popular, a disturbing factor in the early church. This is even noticeable, modern critics would have us believe, in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, though I was unable to find a list of exact references.

I have no intention of giving a digest of Philo's work, except to state that he attempted to fuse Greek philosophy, particularly Plato, with the main truths of the Old Testament, which he distorted with fantastic allegories to suit his particular needs. From Plato he adopted the idea of a divine concept out of which all material things have evolved through so-called emanations. The most important of these emanations was the "Logos" or Word which was the subject of so much discussion that Philo's philosophy was often called the Logos Philosophy. I mention this, because the prologue of John's Gospel where John starts "In the beginning was the Word..." because this passage is often given as an example of Philo's influence on New Testament writers. The explanation is that John was trying to make plain the difference between Christianity and Philo's philosophy. How much truth there is in this view, is another matter. I offer it merely as a point of interest. Any attempt actually to ascertain the extent or even the existence of Philo's influence upon men like Paul and John would necessitate a thorough examination of Philo's work.

But we can be certain that there were classes in Palestine and elsewhere, such as the Sadducees, who did exhibit considerable partiality toward Philo's ideas and readily accepted the viewpoints and outlook characteristic to Western Judaism. As a matter of fact, already in the second century before Christ one of the high priests, Jason by name, had introduced Greek festivals and games in Jerusalem, a movement which was checked, outwardly, at least, under the Maccabees.

The meeting of Greek culture with Hebrew religion must have precipitated one of the greatest struggles in all history, a struggle not only for the minds of men, but for the souls of men. We today with our problems of Fundamentalism vs. Modernism, Orthodoxy vs. Liberalism, Theology vs. Science can have but a small conception of the tremendous forces involved in the clash of Hebrewism vs. Hellenism. Finally, of course, it all comes down to the same struggle which every Christian must wage in some degree or other—the struggle between faith and unbelief, grace and sin, heaven and hell.

With this brief survey of Western Judaism, I bring the topic to an end. Much remains to be said: the literature of the period should certainly be considered, the social conditions, the economic factors ought also be examined. But the sources of information are not too comprehensive, and enough, I feel, has been said to give us a general, if sketchy, picture of the period in question.

Such were some of the developments during the four silent centuries between the Old and New Testaments. They were silent centuries in so far as the Bible is concerned, silent in the sense that God during this time did not see fit to add anything to His inspired Word. But they were far from silent as far as God's eternal plan of salvation was concerned, or in the sense that God did not continue to lead, guide, direct, and control the lot and destiny of men and of nations.

Although it was a period of great activity, a time of sweeping change and tremendous convulsions, yet the period can still be compared with the last quiet hour of darkness just before the dawn, a period of waiting, of expectancy, of anticipation. For in God's own time the world now stood on the very threshold of the most amazing event of all history, before which and after which nothing comparable had ever or would ever again take place. Up to, this time everything else had only been preparation. After this time everything else could only be a looking back in wonder and awe. The fullness of the time had finally come. Man's redemption was at hand. The stage was set. I am that I am stood in the wings, so to speak. Soon now an angel would appear to a maiden named Mary. The silence of four centuries would suddenly be broken, and, wonder of wonders, God Himself would be on the stage, speaking such words as even the angels of heaven had never heard. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among (men) and (men) beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.