

Today's story in our "The Story" sermon series comes from the *Intertestamental Period*, transitioning from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is the period between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. It is known as the silent period when the God of the Old Testament, דַבָּר (Dabar), the God who *speaks*, said nothing for 400 years. In this silence, the God of the New Testament, Τετέλεσται (Tetelestai), the God who *finishes*, was active in shaping the world into which Jesus was born and finished God's mission.

In the Old Testament, God speaks. In the New Testament, God finishes. In between, there is the *Intertestamental Period of Silence*. The Bible is about "It is said" in the Old Testament, "It is finished" in the New Testament, and the silence in between. Today, we will talk about the *Intertestamental Period of Silence* by focusing on the God of the Old Testament, דַבָּר (Dabar), the God who *speaks*.

The last person to speak before the Old Testament comes to a close is Malachi. He tells us that the next prophet who will speak for God is the One we have been waiting for, the One who will provide the once-and-for-all solution for getting us back to God—the Messiah. Malachi foretells that the next time God speaks, which will be 400 years later, it will be through John the Baptist, the one who would prepare the way for Christ to come.

I have often been asked by those who knew about this *Intertestamental Period of Silence* in the Bible. They asked, "Why didn't God speak for years like that?" I sometimes think that when people ask this question, the "question behind the question" is "Why isn't God speaking to us today?" We all want God to speak into our lives, but it often seems that God is silent. So, if we can figure out why God was "silent" in the past, maybe we can also figure out why God is silent in our own lives these days.

The question of "God's years of silence" is much more complex. For example, it is not just the 400 years of silence between Malachi and Matthew where we have no books in the Bible. Other than a few chapters, we have almost no books in the Bible from the years between the story of creation in Genesis 1 and the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. While more liberal scholars believe this period lasted

millions or billions of years, the most conservative biblical scholars say that there were about 2000 years between Genesis 1 and Genesis 12. That's a lot of time for only 11 chapters of biblical history, right?

The Bible doesn't record much of anything that happened for the first 2000 or more years of human history as well as the most recent 2000 years of human history also. In other words, whatever we say about the 400 years of silence between the Old and the New Testaments must also suggest an answer for the 4000+ years of silence in the rest of world history.

Another problem we see in reasoning God's silence in the Bible is that this silence we consider takes place in the biblical context or the stories in the Bible, which only cover the tiniest fraction of human events in history. In other words, even though we have roughly 2000 years of biblical history in Scripture, these records only cover some of the events of some people who lived in a tiny, remote, relatively insignificant corner of the world.

Why, for example, does the Bible not record a single word of what was happening in Asia? Or North and South America? Or Australia? There were certainly important events going on in those places, right? God was also at work in those other countries, was God not? Why then do we have no biblical records of what God was doing in these different places? Why is there nothing but years of silence regarding God's work in the rest of the world?

By framing the question this way, we are now in a position to address the original question we have for today's message. **The question is not just about 400 years of silence between Malachi and Matthew, but about the thousands of years of silence regarding almost everything that has happened in the world.**

Obviously, God could not have recorded everything from every event in every place in the world and given it to us in the Bible. So, instead, we have to trust that God gave us what we needed to know in the Bible so that we can believe what God wants us to believe and do what God wants us to do.

So why did God leave out hundreds of years of documentation on the Bible? Why did God leave out thousands of years and trillions of events from the rest of human history? The answer to these questions is the same.

- **It is not that God wasn't active in these other years. God was.**
- **It is not that nothing was God wasn't speaking, or performing miracles, or answering prayers. God was.**

- **It is not that God was sleeping, absent, ignoring humanity, or off playing a round of golf. God definitely wasn't.**

God is always active. God is always speaking. God is always involved. God is always answering prayers and is always working to accomplish God's will in the world, even when God is not having people write about it. The things God has recorded in the Bible are enough for us to go on. We need neither more nor less. What is written in the Bible is what is needed to know and believe what God is like, what God is doing, and how we are to live and function in this world.

And this brings us back to the unasked question behind the question— "Why does God seem silent in my life?" For those of you who feel that God is silent with you or God is absent in your life, I just want to remind you that our God is Emmanuel God, who is active and present in our lives regardless of how we feel about God. I say this because **God's silence throughout history is not because God was absent or inactive, but simply because it takes eyes of faith to see where God is at work even when God doesn't have someone write about it.**

Even if our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling, even if we do not sense God's presence, even if we feel that God is absent and silent, the reality is the exact opposite. God is with us. God loves us. God hears our prayers. God knows what we need and is involved in our lives. Our God is Emmanuel God, who is with us and active in our lives. It simply takes eyes of faith to see God's hands at work in our lives, even when it seems God is absent or silent. I pray that God will grant us the eyes of faith to see God's hands at work in our lives today. Amen.