

The Reasons It's Important to "Mind the Gap"
Malachi 3:1; 4:1 and Matthew 3:1-2; 11:2-15; 17:12

At the height of the Davidic Kingdom (1000 BC), the nation of Israel stretched from Palmyra in the wilderness on the north to the Gulf of Akaba on the Red Sea on the south. At the close of Malachi (430 BC), Judaism was a little community round about Jerusalem subject to the King of Persia. Things had changed. Israel needed restoration of land, government, religion, people, and their national identity. By the end of the Old Testament, prophetic expectation of a Messiah dominated the Jewish writings.

The Gospel of Matthew explicitly draws on Malachi 3:1 and 4:1 and identifies John the Baptist with Elijah. In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist has taken on the role of Elijah as the precursor of the Messiah (see Matthew 3:1–2; 11:2–15; and especially 17:12). The reader thus moves effortlessly from the prophetic announcement of the end of time and the return of Elijah at the end of the Old Testament to the genealogy and birth of Jesus the Messiah at the beginning of the New Testament.

Israel as a Kingdom (b. 1051 BC), became a nation of valiant, self-sufficient, narrow minded people. By the close of Malachi (420 BC), the Jews formed a chastened, broader-minded, conquered people.

The people had been taught in the school of adversity. They had been brought into contact with world powers and had gained the universal outlook they had learned in the beautiful words of Micah.

"What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly and to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8).

Through its own sufferings Israel had come to think of the Messiah as the suffering servant of the Lord. As we read of the fulfillment of the words of Malachi in the mission of John the Baptist, we are prone to forget that between Malachi and John over four hundred years elapsed (420 BC to Christ's birth).

Wholly different conditions now confront the reader:

Instead of Persia being the ruling power, it is Rome.

Instead of prophets, we hear of a Sanhedrin and scribes and rabbis and religious sects: Pharisees Sadducees and Essenes.

Instead of all religious life centering about the temple and its services, we hear of synagogues and prayers on the corners of the streets.

***The religion of the Old Testament is not the Judaism of Jesus.** To pass from Nehemiah's day to John the Baptist without some knowledge of the political and religious history intervening is like turning from the history of our early colonies to that of modern America without any knowledge of the American Revolution, George Washington, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, World Wars I and II, 9/11, and the War on Terror. The gap is an empty space in the literary record of the Protestant Bible. There is no gap in the history, religion, and literature of Israel.

1. "Mind the Gap" to better understand the New Testament world of Jesus.
2. "Mind the Gap" to better comprehend the various literature within the gap.
3. "Mind the Gap" to better sense the flow of history which is in reality "His Story."
4. "Mind the Gap" to better apprehend the importance of relationship over religion.