

Opener Malachi 4:5

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“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord...” (Mal. 4:5, NASB)

That is how the Old Testament ends—on a note of promise and warning. And then... silence.

- Elijah promised a prophet
- Which signals hope, not abandonment
- And God sets expectations in silence

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Introduction: The Echo in Silence

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Imagine standing in a desert canyon, calling out, and waiting for the echo...

It doesn’t come right away.

The longer you wait, the more alert you become. Your breathing slows... Your ears open.

Silence, far from being empty, can be a space for something new.

That is where we begin today.

Malachi speaks, and then for four centuries, no prophetic word echoes through Israel. The temple stands. Rituals continue. But heaven is quiet. And in that holy hush, God prepares.

In our first sermon in the *400 Years of Silence* series, we explore the question: **Was God absent, or was He at work in the waiting?**¹

These final words do not signal abandonment. They ignite anticipation.

God names the future. He frames the silence as expectation.

Malachi points toward **Elijah**, a figure of renewal and fiery truth. He warns of judgment and the possibility of restoration: hearts turning, generations reconciling.

Even as the curtain falls on the prophetic era, the stage is being set.

The Silence Foretold (Amos 8:11–12)

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Amos gives language to the ache:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord God, "When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11)

¹ The prophetic silence wasn’t God turning His back; it was God turning the page. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1177.

This famine of the Word reveals how precious God's voice had been—and how painful its absence would be.

People will *stagger* from sea to sea, looking for a word.

We, too, know that hunger. We ask, *Where is God? Why doesn't He speak?* But Amos shows us: silence is not cruel. It is consequential.

Sometimes God withholds a word not out of meanness, but because the people have stopped listening.

Insight from Brené Brown: We fear silence because it reveals the deeper truths we've numbed or ignored. Silence surfaces the soul.

Insight from Thomas R. Kelly: The Quaker practice of centering waits on the Word not as noise, but as Presence.²

The First Sound (Luke 1:5–20)

After 400 years, the silence breaks.

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Not with a trumpet.

Not with a king.

God never stopped listening. Heaven was not empty. The silence was full of seed.

An aging priest stands in the temple, accompanied by an angel beside the altar.

Gabriel says, *"Do not be afraid, Zechariah... your prayer has been heard."*

Scripture Reading Luke 1:1-17 If you have your bible, please open to the Gospel of Luke, First Chapter, First Verse...

John, the child of promise, would come *"in the spirit and power of Elijah"* (Luke 1:17), fulfilling Malachi's final prophecy.

Luke doesn't just begin a gospel; he completes a story. The silence isn't an intermission; it's a pregnant pause.³

Revelation is relational. God reveals not just through speech, but through divine encounter.⁴

² Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper, 1941), 3–8.

³ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 3–6.

⁴ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 102–104.

A Place That Shapes People

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Dr. Cyndi Parker reminds us that the geography of the land influences its people. The land of Israel, situated in the trade corridors of empires, remained a crossroads of influence. Even in silence, Israel’s location meant it was never irrelevant.⁵

The central hill country of Israel was not a place of dominance, but of **influence**. It sat in the "land between" empires. Trade routes ran through it. Armies passed by it.

"God chose not a dominating land, but an influencing one."⁶

Even in silence, **Israel mattered**.

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Even in obscurity, God was shaping a people whose influence would outlast Rome.

The roads of history passed through Israel, and God was paving a highway for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3).

OPTIONAL: If time permits, we will run through the following 5 slides quickly:

The People in the New Testament

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Concluding: Why the Silence Wasn’t Empty

The silence of God was not a mistake. It was not neglect. It was not defeat.

It was **preparation**.

God was preparing a people. A place. A promise.

So when Gabriel speaks, when the baby leaps in Elizabeth’s womb, when Mary sings her Magnificat, we realize:

Heaven was never silent. We just had to become quiet enough to hear it.

Conclusion: Centering in Silence

We have long taught that silence is not absence but invitation. To sit in centering silence is not to disengage, but to attend... In your waiting, in your silence, don’t rush to fill the gap. Pause. Prepare. Listen.

Because when the silence breaks, **it will be with the Word made flesh**.

⁵ Cyndi Parker, *Listen to the Land*, BS600-03 Lecture Transcripts, 2021.

⁶ Parker, *Listen to the Land*, Lesson 2.