

KNOW
JESUS



MALACHI

JESUS SHAPED HEARTS

SERIES OVERVIEW

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Overview

Malachi appears as the last of the Minor Prophets, and the final book in our Old Testament (although likely not the last chronologically—see below). As with most other Prophets in the Old Testament, Malachi is concerned with confronting God's people with their sin, and calling them back to God in repentance and faith.

Who wrote it?

'Malachi' means *messenger*. From this book, it is clear that Malachi was a Prophet, but we know nothing more about him.

When did they write it?

Malachi is addressing the nation of Israel sometime after they have returned from exile in Babylon in 538BC.

The various sins mentioned in the book (such as malpractice of the priests at the temple, and the intermarriage with foreign nations) suggest this was written after Israel rebuilt the temple in 516BC, and with enough time for some of these issues to arise and need addressing.

At the other end, it seems most likely that it is written before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, as some of the issues Malachi raises appear to have been resolved by that time.

As such, it is likely that Malachi was written somewhere between 516-458BC.

Why did they write it?

Malachi is written to the Jewish community who have returned from exile. He urges them to repent of their sins, especially those of inappropriate sacrifices and worship, unfaithfulness to God, and intermarriage with those who worship other gods.

Malachi ends by looking toward a future hope that a new 'Elijah' would come and renew the hearts of God's people.



Key Ideas

God's covenant with his people

The book opens and closes with a focus on God's love for his people, and his faithfulness to his covenant with them (1:1-3; 3:17-4:6). Throughout the book, God is calling Israel to account for the ways in which they have been unfaithful in keeping their end of the covenant. Despite this, God's desire is to restore his people and renew his covenant with them once more.

Unfaithful worship

Perhaps the largest issue with Israel in this book is their lack of obedience and respect toward God in their worship practices. They had offered less than acceptable animals for sacrifice (1:7-14). Their priests had failed to lead the people in obedience (2:7-9).

Unfaithful marriages

Along with their failed worship practices, they have been unfaithful in their marriage practices. Men have either wrongly divorced their Israelite wives (2:14-16) or have married women who worship foreign gods (2:11).

A new Elijah

The book closes with a promise that Elijah will come again to the people of God (4:5). This can be seen as a messianic promise that points us to the coming of Jesus as the one who comes in the spirit of Elijah, and who fulfils the prophecies of Malachi. (See also Matthew 11:12-15; 17:9-13; Luke 1:16-17). In traditional Jewish theology, they are still waiting for Elijah to return.

Key Application

Return to obedience

Malachi is a call to God's people to return to him in obedience and faith (3:6, 17-18; 4:2). However great their sins may be, there is opportunity to repent and respond to God's faithfulness through obeying his commands. The book encourages its readers to consider their own faithfulness and attitudes toward God, and to then respond in repentance and faith as necessary.

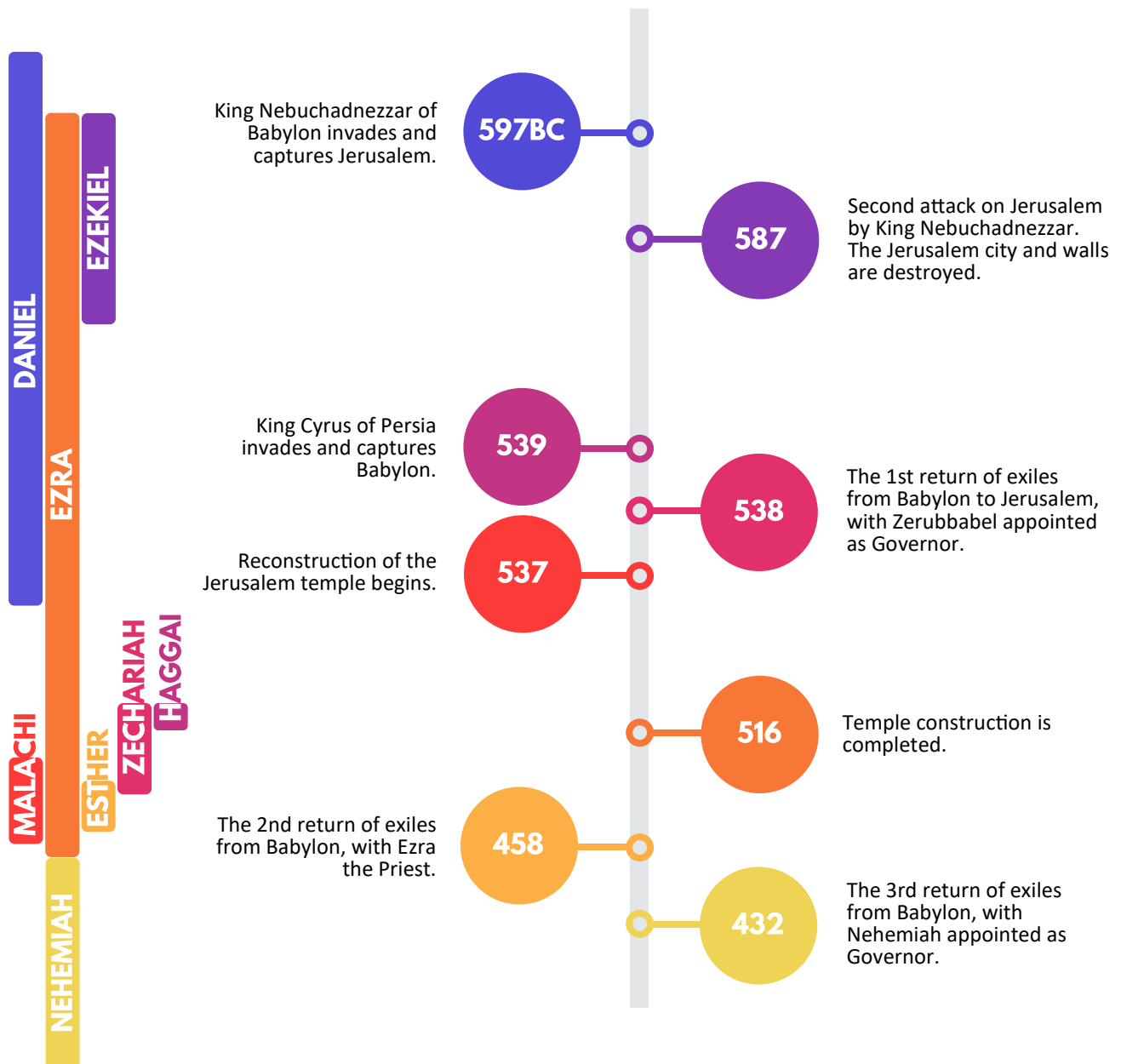
Worship faithfully

Malachi calls us to honour God's name through faithful worship – treating God as he deserves (2:5-6). There is a promise of blessing and flourishing for those who will worship God rightly (3:9-12).



Timeline

The following timeline outlines the historical context around the time that Malachi brought his message. Adjacent to the timeline is an approximate guide to the timing of events covered in other books of the Old Testament.



Summary

1:1-5

God reminds Israel that he loved them by choosing them to be his treasured possession, especially in contrast to the descendants of Esau.

1:6-2:9

God calls out the Israelite priests for their unacceptable sacrifices, and for leading the people astray. He warns them of the punishment that will come for sin, and reminds them of the covenant he had made with them.

2:10-16

A charge against Israel for being unfaithful in their marriage practices, especially by marrying women who worship foreign gods.

2:17-3:5

God responds to the Israelites complaint about the perceived injustice they see around them.

3:6-12

God calls Israel to return to him, with a promise of the covenant being restored.

3:13-4:6

God promises both judgement on those who do evil, and restoration for those who fear the Lord. God will send a future Elijah-type figure who will bring this to fulfilment.



1

God's Heart

Malachi 1:1-5



Big Idea

God's love is shown through his election of Israel.



Passage Overview

Context

Malachi brings a message from God sometime after the temple in Jerusalem has been rebuilt, after returning from exile in Babylon.

Summary

Malachi opens with a statement of God affirming his love for his people, although this is immediately put to question. With Israel's recent experiences in exile, they have seemingly forgotten that it was their disobedience that led to such judgement. They now find themselves desiring proof of God's love for them. God responds by reminding them of their origins: that he chose Jacob and not Esau. And even now, God has rescued the descendants of Jacob from Babylon, while the land of Edom lies in ruin.

Structure

- 1:1 Introduction to the book
- 1:2ab Statement and request for evidence
- 1:2c-5 God's response



Definitions

Edom—Another name for Esau, typically used to speak of Esau's descendants, known as the Edomites.



2

Disconnected Hearts

Malachi 1:6-2:9



Big Idea

Israel's priests failed to honour God with their sacrifices or leadership.



Passage Overview

Context

On returning from exile, Israel took about 21 years to rebuild the temple—a task that should have been completed much sooner. The books of Malachi and Ezra both highlight ways in which Israel were less than faithful in their worship of God.

Summary

The first of a series of charges against Israel is made to open this passage, where God has not been treated with the respect he deserves. A series of examples are provided of the priests offering improper sacrifices (1:8-14), as well as leading the people astray through their teaching (2:7-9).

Structure

- 1:6-7b Accusations and request for evidence
 - 1:7c-10 Example of inappropriate animal sacrifices
 - 1:11 Statement of God's holiness
 - 1:12-14 Further example of inappropriate animal sacrifices
- 2:1-3 Warning of punishment for their sins
- 2:4-6 Reminder of God's covenant with his people
- 2:7-9 Example of the ways the priests have failed to keep the covenant



Definitions

Covenant—An alliance, agreement or promise between two parties. There are many covenants between God and his people throughout the Old Testament (E.g. Noah [Genesis 9:8-17], Abraham [Genesis 12, 15,17], Moses. [Exodus 19]). The specific covenant with Levi mentioned in 2:4 is unclear, but is likely a reference to God's special relationship with the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe (e.g. Exodus 32:26-29; Numbers 25:11-13; Deuteronomy 10:8-9).



3

Unfaithful Hearts

Malachi 2:10-16



Big Idea

Israel's unfaithfulness in marriage is representative of their unfaithfulness to God.



Passage Overview

Context

Upon returning to Jerusalem from exile, not only had the people been unfaithful to God in their worship, but they had also been unfaithful to one another in their marriages. Marrying foreigners who worshipped other gods was prohibited for Israel, because it was likely to result in leading Israel themselves to turn to idolatry in worshipping these foreign gods.

Summary

After highlighting how Israel has been unfaithful to their covenant with God, Malachi turns to highlight how they have also been unfaithful to one another, especially in their marriage covenants. They have dishonoured God by their lack of faithfulness.

Structure

- 2:10 Accusation of sin
- 2:11-12 An example of unfaithfulness to God through marrying foreign women
- 2:13 The results of their sin are exposed
- 2:14 An example of unfaithfulness within a marriage relationship
- 2:15-16 A call to holiness



Definitions

Tents of Jacob—This phrase is used to refer to both the community and heritage of the people with whom God made his covenant. To be removed from the tents of Jacob is to no longer belong to Israel or inherit the promises of God to his people.



4

Aching Hearts

Malachi 2:17-3:5



Big Idea

God promises he will bring justice to all.



Passage Overview

Context

As immorality and corruption increased in Israel, people questioned the perceived lack of justice that God was bringing upon those who do evil. Though, as Malachi has already highlighted, they likely failed to see their own contributions to evil. Here we see them question God's own faithfulness to his covenant in holding people to account for their actions.

Summary

Israel questions God's character and justice in dealing with evil. They want God to bring justice on evildoers, because they do not consider themselves to have committed evil. God responds by promising to send a messenger who will prepare for God himself to come and bring justice to all.

Structure

- 2:17ab Accusation and request for evidence
 - 2:17c Evidence of Israel's sin
- 3:1 Announcement of God coming to his people
 - 3:2-4 The effect of God's coming on the righteous
 - 3:5-7 The effect of God's coming on the unrighteous



Definitions

Launderer's soap—This was used to remove impurities and unclean elements from clothing.

Levites—The Levites were a tribe of Israel, descendants of Levi, the son of Jacob. They had the role of serving in the temple (Deuteronomy 10:8-9). Priests in Israel were all from the tribe of Levi.



**Big Idea**

God promises to bless those who repent of their sin and obey him.

**Passage Overview****Context**

After highlighting Israel's sin, and the promise of justice, God invites Israel to turn away from sin and back to him. Though they have been unfaithful to God, there is opportunity for them to reverse their actions and therefore their standing before God when he brings about his justice.

Summary

Despite Israel's sin, God calls them to repent and live in faithful obedience to the covenant. He promises that obedience will result in great blessings.

Structure

- 3:6 Statement of God's faithfulness
- 3:7a Accusation of sin
- 3:7bc Call to respond and request for clarity
- 3:8-9 Further accusation of sin
- 3:10a Call to faithful obedience
- 3:10b-12 Promise of blessing to those who obey God

**Definitions**

Tithes and offerings—In Israel, these could be considered almost as an ancient form of tax.

Curse—This is the opposite of the blessing Israel would receive if they obeyed God. (See Deuteronomy 28:15-19)



6

Restored Hearts

Malachi 3:13-4:6



Big Idea

God promises grace to the righteous and judgement for the wicked.



Passage Overview

Context

The ongoing complaint of perceived injustice being allowed to flourish is confronted by God with a sense of finality.

Summary

God again calls Israel to account for their lack of trust in his justice. God then promises justice for those who are righteous, and judgement for those who are wicked. A final call to obedience is accompanied by a promise of a future messenger who will be a part of this fulfilment of God's justice.

Structure

- 3:13 Accusation and request for evidence
- 3:14-15 Evidence of Israel's sin
- 3:16 Response of the righteous to God's message
- 3:17-4:3 God's response to the righteous and to the wicked
- 4:4 Final call to obedience
- 4:5-6 Promise of hope through a future prophet



Definitions

Horeb—Another name for Mount Sinai, where Moses received the 10 commandments (Deuteronomy 5:2). Also the location where Moses met God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1), and where God appeared to Elijah (1 Kings 19:8-18).

Elijah— An Old Testament prophet (1 Kings 17-19), notable for his unusual ascension into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). In the New Testament, John the Baptist is said to have come in the spirit of Elijah.

Day of the LORD—A future day when all of God's promises will come to completion.



Resources

Online Commentary

An Exegetical Commentary - Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

An excellent, in-depth commentary.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/malachi>

Videos

The Bible Project

A visual summary of the contents and structure of Malachi.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/malachi/>

Other

Introduction to Malachi

A brief outline taken from the ESV study bible.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/malachi/>

Knowing the Bible: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

A study series on all three books. It includes two sections on Malachi, including reflections, discussion questions and theological insights.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-the-bible-haggai-zechariah-and-malachi/>

