

INTRODUCTION:

Because they had not obeyed the word of the Lord, in 586 B.C. the children of Israel were taken into captivity. The nation that was once the head became the tail, just as God had spoken through His prophet Moses. And just as God had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, the children of Israel’s captivity lasted for 70 years. In 538 B.C. Cyrus, the king of Persia, issued a decree allowing the children of Israel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. It was just as God had said when Isaiah gave this prophecy 175 years before Cyrus was born.

The earth was peaceful and quiet. All the nations, except for Israel, were at rest. From Israel’s perspective, it looked as if God had abandoned His people and forgotten His holy city, Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s walls were torn down, Solomon’s temple had been destroyed. Discouragement reigned. Only a remnant returned to Jerusalem after the 70 years of exile—a small remnant in comparison to the number of people taken captive. Many Jews were reluctant to leave Babylon to return to Jerusalem. The land of their captors had become home. The Babylonians had allowed them to establish businesses. They had built their houses. Their children while born in captivity, were secure. Why should they leave? Yet, a small remnant returned to rebuild the temple, soon to become a discouraging task. Their zeal dwindled. What was enthusiastically begun was forgotten before God’s house was completed. For about sixteen years the temple stood unfinished and ignored. Even if the temple were completed it would not begin to equal Solomon’s.

Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, both about 520 B.C., were called to herald God’s Word. Haggai would provide explanation of the lack of productivity of the land and reason for rebuilding the temple so that the sin of the land could be removed and God restored to His rightful place in the midst of His people. Likewise, Zechariah would also preach a message of encouragement, both providing explanation and reason for rebuilding the temple, as well as hope for a better future with the coming of the Messiah.

Malachi, whose name means “my messenger” would come 100 years after the first of the remnant returned and after the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem. The remnant had grown apathetic in their relationship with God, no longer worshiping according to God’s dictates and were doubting the fulfillment of the prophecies which promised that the Messiah would reign as King over all the earth. Perhaps they even

believed that God no longer loved them. Malachi would come as the final prophetic messenger to God’s people, calling them to put God first and not to doubt His promises. Following Malachi there would be 400 years of silence before the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

BOOK OF HAGGAI:

In 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire, and a year later Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return. By 536 B.C. the first group had arrived and laid the foundation of the temple. Because of opposition from neighboring peoples, work on the temple stopped (see Ezra 4:4-5) and was not resumed until God raised up Haggai and Zechariah sixteen years later to preach the need to complete the reconstruction project. Over a four month period in 520 B.C., Haggai delivered four messages concerning this effort. The first and third messages explained that the land’s lack of productivity was because the temple lay in ruins and the land was still unclean. The other two were words of reassurance that God was supporting the project and would prosper them. The people quickly responded to the challenge, and the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 515 B.C. A summary of the four messages or prophecies is as follows:

1. On the first day of the sixth month the prophet reproaches those who left the Temple in ruins and built paneled houses for themselves, and he points out that God’s blessing is withheld from their ordinary labor. In consequence of this exhortation, work on the Temple was resumed on the 24th day of the same month.

2. In the seventh month, 21st day, he encourages those who mourn over the humble character of the new building as compared with the splendor of Solomon’s Temple. He predicts that the latter glory of the house shall be greater than the former glory, for God will shake the nations and the desirable things of all nations, their silver and gold, shall come and fill the house with glory, and God will give peace in that place (Haggai. 2:1-9; Hebrews 12:26-28).

3. In the ninth month, 24th day, he adds a sequel to the first prophecy. As the touch of the unclean pollutes the clean, so their former neglect of God polluted their labor and God did not bestow His blessing. But their revived zeal for God will be accompanied by fruitful seasons from the Lord (Haggai 2:10-19).

4. On the same day he adds a sequel to the second prophecy. When the Lord shakes the nations, He will establish Zerubbabel, who represents the royal line of David (Haggai 2:20-23).

(To prosper you must build a House for God before you build one for yourself)

Haggai 1:3-7

(3) Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, (4) *"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"* (5) Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, *"Consider your ways!* (6) *You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."* (7) Thus says the LORD of hosts, *"Consider your ways!"*

(True treasure and peace will be found only in God's House)

Haggai 2:8-9

(8) *"The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. (9) 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I shall give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."*

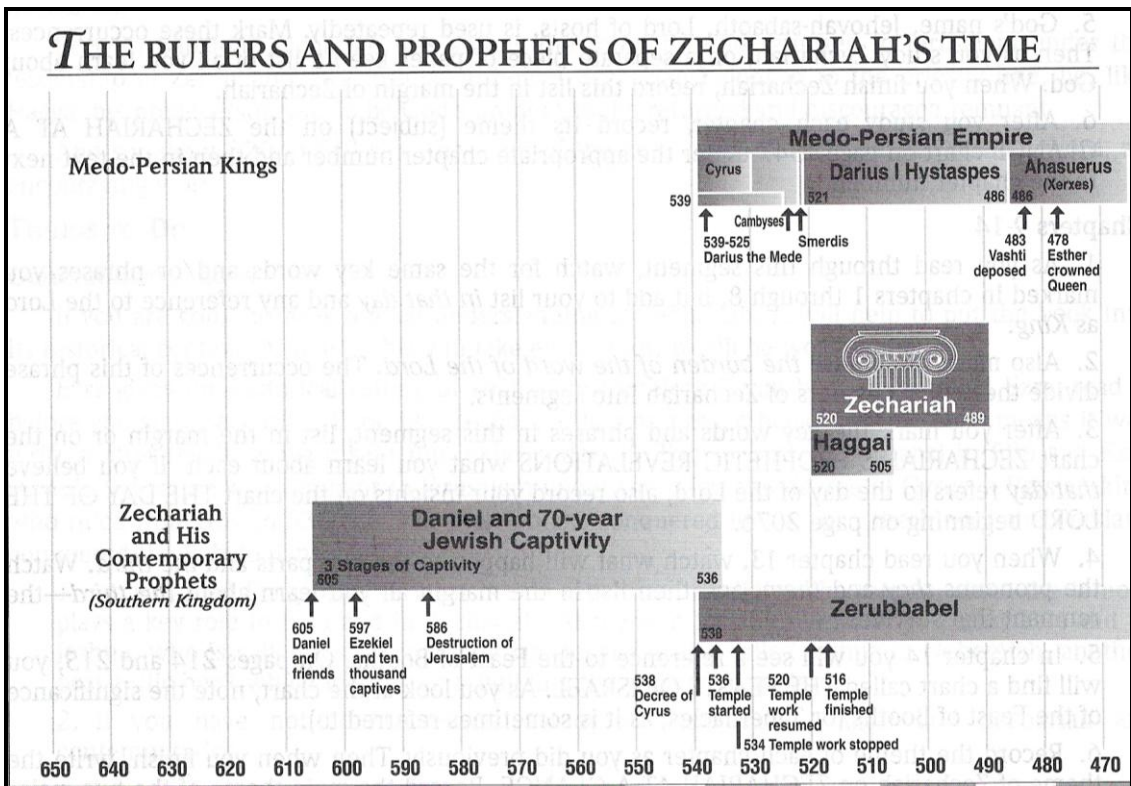
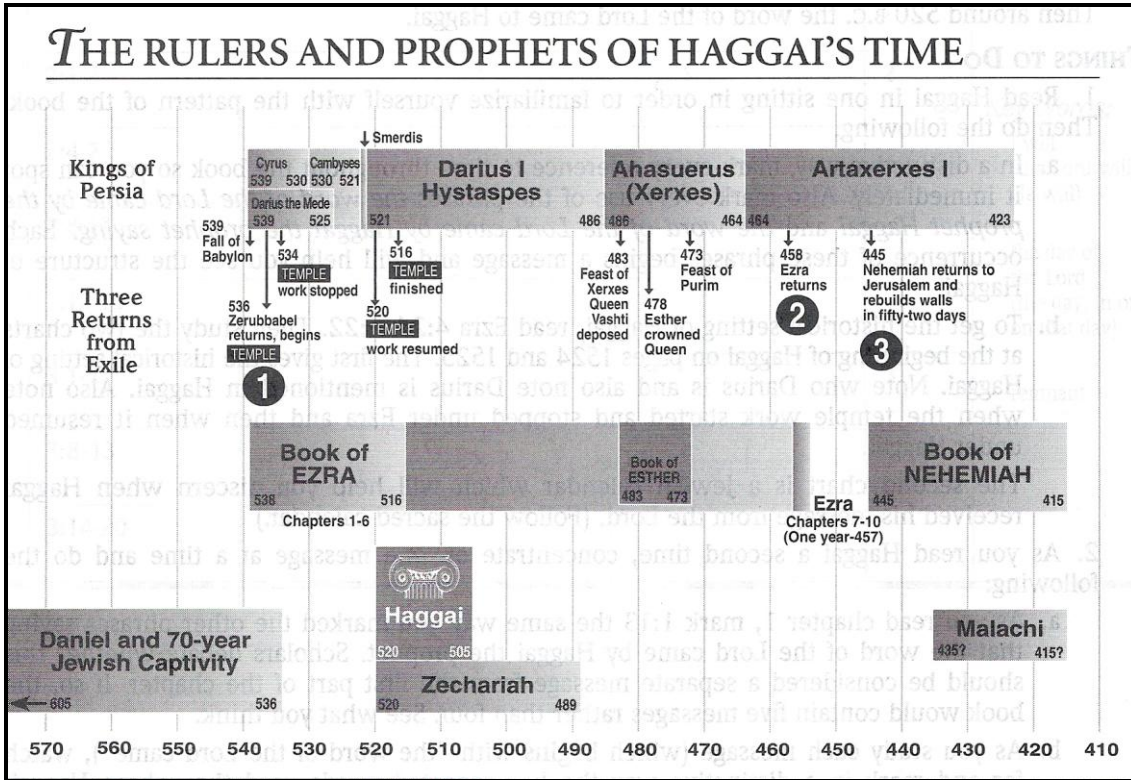
Questions to think about regarding the message of Haggai:

1. Have you given too much attention and time to your personal affairs and needs but neglected the things of God that are important for the spreading of the gospel or the furtherance of His work?
2. What might God be trying to say when cataclysmic events take place? Do you take advantage of these things to turn people's attention and thoughts to God?
3. When discouraged in your service to God, do you quit, or do you courageously persevere, determined to be faithful and to leave the outcome to God?

Central Teaching of Haggai:

Placing priority on building a house for God. In Haggai's time this was perceived as rebuilding the Temple. For us it is the rebuilding of a spiritual dwelling place for God's Holy Spirit within our hearts.

The chart below shows the rulers, prophets and events of Haggai’s time:



BOOK OF ZECHARIAH:

Zechariah and Haggai both preached to the first generation after the return to Judah from the Babylonian exile. Many of the economic hardships which the people had experienced since they returned were caused by the fact that, with no temple in operation, the land was still polluted from their former sins and would not produce well. Response to Zechariah and Haggai’s preaching was immediate and complete. By 515 B.C. the temple was finished and in operation again. Chapters 1—8 of Zechariah relate to the years 520-518 B.C. The oracles supported the leadership of Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the high priest, especially in connection with the temple project. The glorious future of Jerusalem and the remnant who returned to it is also vividly depicted. Some of Zechariah’s visions are filled with rich apocalyptic-type imagery. Both Zerubbabel and Joshua were anointed leaders, and in certain passages it is difficult to determine whether they are being referred to or whether it is the future Messiah. At any rate, Jesus’ dual Messianic role as both king and priest finds its closest Old Testament basis here. Chapters 9—14 are very different from the earlier chapters in that they deal exclusively with the future beyond Zechariah’s day. The time frame for the fulfillment of individual prophecies is a disputed point among scholars, but several passages were seen by New Testament writers as being fulfilled by Jesus. These include such events as Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His arrest, His crucifixion and His Second Coming.

The Book of Zechariah is separated into two divisions. Chapters 1—8 form the **First Division** and can be further broken down into three parts as follows:

1. Introduction to the book and a series of eight visions. The introduction (1:1-6) strikes the keynote to these visions. Learn the lesson of the past: “Return to me... and I will return to you.”

Vision 1: The Lord’s horsemen (1:7-17), fleet, tireless messengers. By this picture it is shown that God is watching the events of earth; there is no sign of relief for God’s people or of the punishment of their oppressors; the nations are at rest. Yet God is jealous for Zion and sore displeased with its oppressors; therefore, He has returned to Jerusalem with mercies; His house and His city shall be built; the land shall greatly prosper. The first vision is introductory to the seven that follow.

Vision 2: The four horns and the four smiths (1:18-21). The vision means that for each of the horns, i.e., nations that scattered Judah, destruction is appointed.

Vision 3: The man with the measuring line (chapter 2). The comfortable message of the first vision is unfolded, namely, the rebuilding of the city. The idea is expanded, however. Jerusalem shall not be measured, as cities usually are, by the extent of its walls; for, enjoying unbounded prosperity, it shall spread abroad without walls. It will not be insecure, however; Yahweh will be a wall of fire about it.

Vision 4: Joshua, the high priest, and Satan (chapter 3). The priesthood, although human and defiled, a brand being consumed in the fire of God’s wrath, is by grace plucked forth, cleansed, and, on condition of obedience, promised continuance. The restored priesthood is a pledge of the approach of the Messianic Kingdom; the Messiah is called “my servant the Branch.”

Vision 5: The golden lampstand and the two olive trees (chapter 4). It seems as if the light of the church, burning feebly after the exile, must needs go out; but it is not so, for God has provided an abundant, unfailing, self-furnishing supply of oil.

Vision 6: The flying scroll (5:1-4). God has pronounced a curse for the destruction of wickedness.

Vision 7: The departing ephah (5:5-11). This is the sequel of the sixth vision. Wickedness, personified as a woman in an ephah, is removed from the land.

Vision 8: The four chariots issuing from between two mountains of bronze from the presence of the Lord of all the earth (6:1-8). The four chariots go forth to the four winds, or the four cardinal points; and the vision is a promise that the entire plan outlined in the preceding series will be executed by the Lord of all the earth.

2. Symbolic action: crowning of the high priest (6:9-15). This passage contains a textual problem. In verse 11 and 14 the Hebrew has the plural “crowns.” This signifies that 2 crowns were made, one for Joshua and one for Zerubbabel, and that in verse 11 the name of the latter was omitted. Zerubbabel is the Branch, or Messiah (3:8), who shall build the Temple and reign as king, while Joshua is to be enthroned as priest so that the two will rule together as the civil and religious heads respectively of the community.

3. Deputation from Bethel to inquire whether the fasts shall still be kept, now that the disasters that they commemorated have been in part retrieved, and the prophet's four answers (chapters 7 & 8): (1) Fasts terminate on the person who fasts; they do not affect God; obedience is the one thing God requires (7:4-7). (2) Justice and truth are the will of God, which is to be obeyed. The desolation of the land and dispersion of the people were not a calamity to be bewailed; they were a punishment for disobedience and intended to work reform (7:1-14). (3) God returns to Zion in jealousy, and will secure truth and holiness (8:1-17). (4) The fasts will become festivals (8:18-23).

The Second Division includes “burdens” that follow the visions which revealed God's purpose to destroy the oppressors of Judah and bring many nations into the Kingdom.

Burden 1: Yahweh's overthrow of the enemies of God's Kingdom. Punishments are impending that shall the surrounding nations low. A remnant of Philistia, however, shall be incorporated in God's Kingdom; and Jerusalem shall be safe amid the widespread desolation, for God shall encamp about Judah and Judah's king shall come (chapter 9). Episode: exhortation to look to the Lord for promised blessings, and not to idols and soothsayers, who only cause the flock to err (10:1-2). Resumption of the prophecy. The Lord, however, as already said, has visited His flock, and because of His wrath will make it as His proud steed in battle, free Judah from all oppressors, gather both Judah and Ephraim, and make Ephraim joyful in his former habitation (10:3-12). These promised blessings, however, will not be enjoyed for some time to come. “Desolation to the land!” is the prophet's cry (11:1-3). The reason for this desolation is explained by the parable of the rejected shepherd (11:4-17): because of the continued rejection of God's righteous government, the covenant with the nations is broken, and Israel is open to desolation; because of the same sin, the unity of Judah and Ephraim remains unaccomplished, and weakness, discord, and desolation result.

Burden 2: The conflict and final triumph of the Kingdom of God. The nations of the earth are arrayed against Jerusalem and Judah, which at the time of the writer were coextensive with the visible church of Yahweh; but Yahweh makes Jerusalem “a cup of reeling” and a heavy stone to the nations, smiting the enemy with madness, and revealing the fact that the inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts (12:1-8).

The preparation of Jerusalem (12:9 to 14:5): God will prepare Jerusalem, first, by gracious spiritual change wrought by Himself (12:10 to 13:6); second, by purifying chastisement (13:7 to 14:5a). The final triumph (14:5b-21). The Lord shall come; it shall be a time of darkness and judgment, both for the church and the nations; but at a time appointed of God, at eventide there shall be light. The church shall flourish, and a remnant of the nations shall go up from year to year to worship Yahweh, the king. Then shall the idea of the Kingdom of God be realized, the church shall be holy.

(Repentance, returning to God will cause God to return to us)

Zechariah 1:3

(3) *“Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Return to Me,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I may return to you,” says the LORD of hosts.*

(Jesus’ Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem?)

Zechariah 9:9 *(See Matthew 21:5; John 12:15)*

(9) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(Jesus’ Death on the Cross and Second Coming?)

Zechariah 12:10 *(See Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7)*

(10) *“And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”*

(Jesus quoted and applied this passage to Himself on the Mount of Olives?)

Zechariah 13:7-9 *(See Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27)*

(7) *“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate,”* declares the LORD of hosts. *“Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.* (8) *And it will come about in all the land,”* declares the LORD, *“That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it.* (9) *And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is*

refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

(Faithfulness will lead to God's universal rule)

Zechariah 14:9

(9) And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Central Teaching of Zechariah:

Faithfulness to God will lead to God's universal rule both in one's heart and in the world.

Questions to think about regarding Zechariah's message:

1. Have you been touched by the awesomeness of God's sovereignty? What does it mean to you personally to realize that God reigns supreme over the nations? That He has declared things before they have come to pass, and that as He has purposed, so it shall be? If He can handle nations, can He handle your life?

2. Do you take time to listen—really listen—to what God says in His Word? If you have not listened, God's invitation to return to Him is still there in Zechariah for you. Believe Him and return.

3. How can you apply the truth of Zechariah 4:6-7 to your own life? Remember the things that were written in the Old Testament were written for our encouragement and perseverance. They are not simply historical records; they are the bread of life by which we live.

4. God said, “The Lord is coming; He will dwell in our midst.” Are you prepared? According to 1 John 3:2-3 the coming of the Lord is a purifying hope. What do you need to do in order not to be ashamed at His coming?

BOOK OF MALACHI

Malachi means “my messenger.” Because nothing else is mentioned of him in the Old Testament and because of the meaning of the word, some scholars have thought that Malachi may have been a pen name used by the prophet. This possibility is mentioned in an ancient Jewish tradition. The prophecy was probably written in the period between 450 and 425 B.C. This was the time of Nehemiah, about 100 years after the first exiles

had returned from Babylon. The book reflects that era. The temple had been completed and sacrifices were being offered, but the priests were careless. The people doubted God and were intermarrying outside Israel. Judah was under a governor and Edom had been destroyed.

The prophet's style is unique in the Old Testament. He makes a statement and then asks a question growing out of that statement. In the answers to these questions Malachi sets forth the greater portion of his message.

The enthusiasm that marked the Jews' return to Jerusalem 100 years earlier was gone. They were discouraged. There was a drought and the crops were bad. They expected a golden age of prosperity but it had not dawned. Did not God care? Malachi answered these doubts: God is still on His throne! Look what He did to Edom. God deals with sin. Pay your tithes, obey Him, and see how He will bless you. The Messiah is coming! He will destroy the wicked and give victory to the righteous. But before that day the prophet, Elijah, must come.

The Book of Malachi may be divided into the following sections:

1. God's special love for Israel, shown in His choice of Jacob instead of Esau (1:2-5), was not requited; (a) The priests and people dishonored God by presenting blemished offerings (1:6-14); punishment threatened for this departure from the norm established by God for the priesthood and once realized (2:1-9); (b) The people dealt treacherously against their brethren, intermarrying with the heathen, putting away their own wives, and doing deeds of violence (2:10-16); according to this prophet, the Lord hates divorce.

2. Judgment imminent. God's messenger is about to prepare the way; the Lord Himself will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant shall come as judge and purify Levi from dress and visit evildoers (2:17 to 3:6; Exodus 23:20-23; Matthew 11:10).

3. Call to repentance. Then the Lord will come in blessing and judgment, putting to nought the complaint that He makes no distinction between the good and the evil. Those who have turned from sin to God will be His peculiar treasure, but the wicked shall be burned as stubble (3:7 to 4:3). Exhortation to remember the law of

Moses, and announcement of the mission of Elijah to prepare for the terrible day of the Lord (4:4-6; Matthew 17:10-13; Luke 1:17).

(Jesus applied this verse to John the Baptist)

Malachi 3:1 *(See Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27)*

(1) "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

(Return to Me and give Me what is Mine and I will pour out blessings upon you.)

Malachi 3:7-10

(7) "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes, and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?' (8) Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. (9) You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! (10) Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

(Honor God and His righteousness will bring healing and joy)

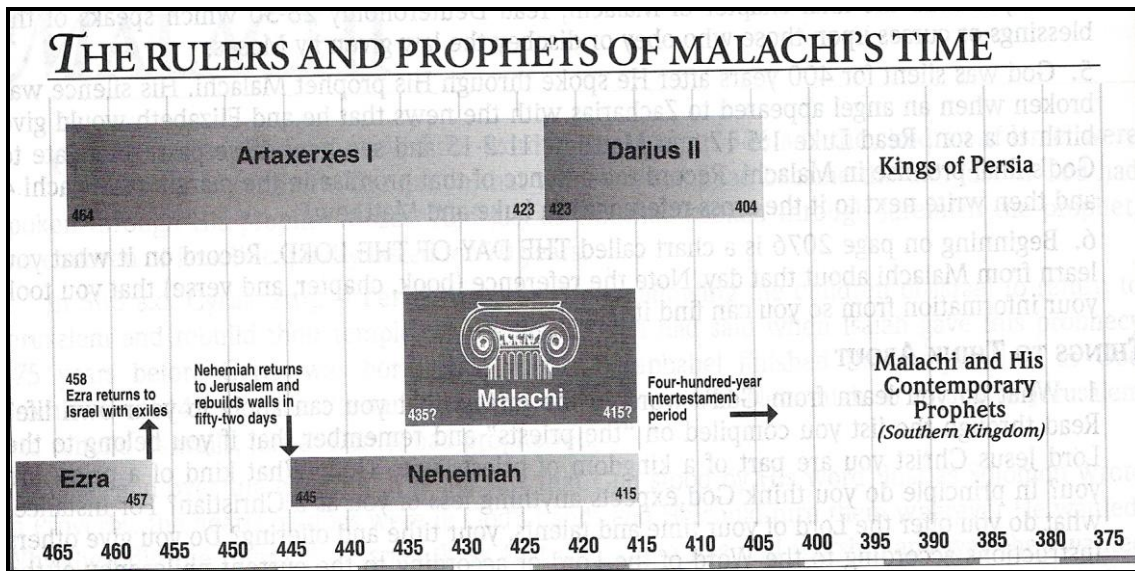
Malachi 4:2

(2) "But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

(Elijah the prophet to come to prepare the way for the Messiah)

Malachi 4:5-6 *(See Matthew 11:11-14, 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17)*

(5) "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (6) And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."



Central teaching of Malachi:

Honor God and wait for His righteousness and you will not be disappointed.

Questions to think about regarding Malachi's message:

1. What does God's Word regarding priests can be applied to your own life?

What kind of a priest are you? What does God expect from you as a Christian? Do you offer the Lord of your time and talents, your tithe and offering? Do you give others instructions according to the Word of the Lord or according to the current philosophy of the world? What about your covenant relationship with your mate?

2. Are you tired of serving God? Do you fear Him? If so, what is God's promise to you?

References:

Commentary from *"The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible"* and *"Zodhiates' Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible"* published by AMG Publishers.

Illustrations from *"The International Inductive Study Bible."*