

# PROPHETS



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# PROPHETS

## Big Picture

Reading the Old Testament raises lots of questions for us. Why do bad things happen to God’s people? Why does God allow his people to suffer? How can a loving, merciful God also be angry and violent?

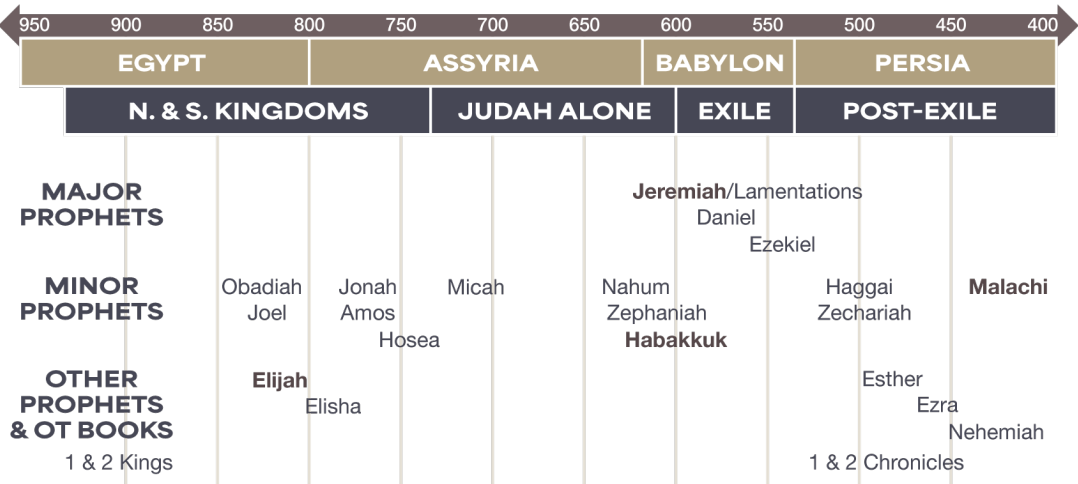
Many Old Testament stories are hard to read, and unimaginable evil occurs. Through this series, Prophets, we want to explore the big picture of what God is doing through Israel over the course of the Old Testament. We will study four prophets at different time periods of Israel’s history, reading about each one to better understand how God is setting the stage for Jesus’ arrival.

## Why Prophets?

God made a covenant with his chosen people—he asked them to live obedient lives, and he promised to be faithful, protect them, and grow them into a great nation. However, throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites repeatedly turn away from God and worship other gods. After warning his people, God disciplines the Israelites through captivity, exile, and slavery at the hands of other nations. He uses these moments to draw the Israelites back into fellowship with himself. He disciplines them out of love and kindness, but he also shows the people that they need someone greater than themselves to save them from their sins.

The prophets had a specific job—to proclaim these messages from God. They warned the people of the coming judgment, they called the people to repentance, and they offered hope and the promise of a coming Messiah.

THEMES	
Elijah	God’s Sovereignty
Habakkuk	Idolatry
Jeremiah	Difficult Obedience
Malachi	God’s Covenant Love









# ELIJAH

## God's Sovereignty

### Setting

Northern and Southern Kingdoms

### Scripture

1 Kings 17–19

### Theme of the Week

#### God's Sovereignty

Throughout these three chapters, God controls nature (rain, drought, and fire) to demonstrate his power and supremacy over false gods like Baal (the supposed storm god). Through Elijah, God exposes Baal's powerlessness and calls Israel to repentance. God is calling his people to abandon their worship of idols and return to him.

### Big Picture Narrative

Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly calls his people back to himself after they have fallen away. Often, the nation of Israel is distracted by other gods and different cultures, and they forget about the Lord's covenant with them. Similar to the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7–12), the story of Elijah demonstrates God's power over false gods and his sovereignty over all creation. God uses his power to show the nations that he is the one true God and restore his people to himself.

Scan to watch  
The Bible Project's  
Character Insight  
on Elijah:



## Day 1 | 1 Kings 17

1 Elijah's name means "my God is Yahweh."

2 God is the Creator of the earth. He is in control of everything, including the rain.

3 God will sustain Elijah through the drought, showing that he is sovereign over creation, here, through the ravens.

4 The Lord provides. This time, he uses a widow as his vessel for provision.

5 Our obedience matters. The widow had to obey and trust that God would continue to provide everything she needed to live.

6 This is the first death-to-life moment in Scripture. The Lord shows he is sovereign even over human life.

Now Elijah,<sup>1</sup> who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!"<sup>2</sup>

Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food."<sup>3</sup>

So Elijah did as the Lord told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.

Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you."<sup>4</sup>

So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too."

But she said, "I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."

But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!"<sup>5</sup>

So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah.

Some time later the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. Then she said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?"

But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the child's body from her arms, carried him up the stairs to the room where he was staying, and laid the body on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, why have you brought tragedy to this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?"

And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, please let this child's life return to him." The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he revived<sup>6</sup>! Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look!" he said. "Your son is alive!"

Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you."



## Reflection

What characteristics of God are on display throughout this chapter?

God shows his power and sovereignty over all of creation. In what ways have you witnessed God's power in your own life?

## Day 2 | 1 Kings 18

1 Because Elijah says rain is coming, the King will not be able to deny that God sent it.

Later on, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, “Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!” So Elijah went to appear before Ahab.

2 Obadiah’s respect for the Lord translated into respect for God’s servant, Elijah.

Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria. So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Obadiah was a devoted follower of the Lord. Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.) Ahab said to Obadiah, “We must check every spring and valley in the land to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules.” So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

As Obadiah was walking along, he suddenly saw Elijah coming toward him. Obadiah recognized him at once and bowed low to the ground before him. “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?” he asked.

“Yes, it is,” Elijah replied. “Now go and tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”

3 Obadiah is able to plead for his life on the basis of his faithfulness to the Lord.

“Oh, sir,” Obadiah protested, “what harm have I done to you that you are sending me to my death at the hands of Ahab? For I swear by the Lord your God that the king has searched every nation and kingdom on earth from end to end to find you. And each time he was told, ‘Elijah isn’t here,’ King Ahab forced the king of that nation to swear to the truth of his claim. And now you say, ‘Go and tell your master, “Elijah is here.”’ But as soon as I leave you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you away to who knows where. When Ahab comes and cannot find you, he will kill me. Yet I have been a true servant of the Lord all my life.<sup>3</sup> Has no one told you, my lord, about the time when Jezebel was trying to kill the Lord’s prophets? I hid 100 of them in two caves and supplied them with food and water. And now you say, ‘Go and tell your master, “Elijah is here.”’ Sir, if I do that, Ahab will certainly kill me.”

But Elijah said, “I swear by the Lord Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab this very day.”

4 Ahab still blames Elijah for the drought. He has yet to see that Elijah is just a messenger from God, who is the one really in control.

So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, “So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?”<sup>4</sup>

“I have made no trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the Lord and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.”

So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!”<sup>5</sup> But the people were completely silent.

5 Elijah is about to put God and Baal up against each other to prove who the one and only true God is.

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose



whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!” And all the people agreed.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood.”

So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

About noontime Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”<sup>6</sup>

So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out<sup>7</sup>. They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

Then Elijah called to the people, “Come over here!” They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the Lord. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood.

Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood.”

After they had done this, he said, “Do the same thing again!” And when they were finished, he said, “Now do it a third time!” So they did as he said, and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench<sup>8</sup>.

At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”<sup>9</sup>

Immediately<sup>10</sup> the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, “The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!”

Then Elijah commanded, “Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don’t let a single one escape!” So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there<sup>11</sup>.

Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go get something to eat and drink, for I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!”

**6** Elijah makes fun of Baal because of how clearly fake and powerless he is.

**7** In pagan cultures, people would shed their blood to show devotion to their gods.

**8** Elijah wants to make the task as difficult as he can. That way, people will have no doubt that God set the fire.

**9** Elijah is not worried about bringing glory to himself. He is only focused on the Lord getting the glory, honor, and praise he deserves.

**10** Unlike the pagans’ long rituals and calling on Baal, Elijah receives an immediate answer from God.

**11** The prophets of Baal, who were turning people away from God to serve another, were killed in accordance with the law of Moses. Read Deuteronomy 13:5, 13:13–18, and 18:9–22 for reference.

# ELIJAH

So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.

Then he said to his servant, “Go and look out toward the sea.”

The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, “I didn’t see anything.”

The number seven appears often throughout Scripture as the number of completion.

**12** Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. Finally the seventh time<sup>12</sup>, his servant told him, “I saw a little cloud about the size of a man’s hand rising from the sea.”

Then Elijah shouted, “Hurry to Ahab and tell him, ‘Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don’t hurry, the rain will stop you!’”

And soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel. Then the Lord gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.

## Reflection

List the different characteristics of God that were evident in today’s reading.

Where else in Scripture do we see some of those characteristics?

How have you seen those characteristics of God in your own life?



## Day 3 | 1 Kings 19

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.”

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord<sup>2</sup>,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”

Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.<sup>3</sup>

But the Lord said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

“Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper<sup>4</sup>. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied again, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

Then the Lord told him, “Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!”<sup>5</sup>

**1** Jezebel is upset that the prophets were killed. She is going to fight on behalf of Baal.

**2** Elijah is tired. Being a prophet for the Lord is not an easy calling. It draws him to the end of himself and only God’s strength can sustain him.

**3** In this beautiful scene, the Lord is gentle with his servant Elijah. He is not angered by his weakness, but compassionate and kind. God provides nourishment, rest, and protection.

**4** All of the other signs were forceful and harsh, but a gentle whisper reveals a different characteristic of the Lord.

**5** The Lord will raise up new, devoted people to follow him, be obedient, and continue his mission.

# ELIJAH

This symbolizes Elijah commissioning Elisha to join in the work of prophecy. **6**

This is a sign of full commitment. Elisha destroys his work so he cannot return to it. **7**

So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and **threw his cloak across his shoulders**<sup>6</sup> and then walked away. Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, “First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!”

Elijah replied, “Go on back, but think about what I have done to you.”

So Elisha returned to his oxen and **slaughtered them**.<sup>7</sup> He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

## Reflection

What characteristics of God are revealed through the gentle whisper?

How does Elisha’s response to his calling teach us to respond to the Lord?



## Day 4

Similar to the plagues in Egypt, God's power against other gods is on display throughout our reading this week. God shows how all creation is under his control through the drought, rain, fire, and supernatural protection over his own people. And for what purpose? It was all to bring his people back to right standing with him and ultimately, to bring glory to himself. Not only does he show his control, but he also shows his worthiness of the people's respect and praise.

Later in the New Testament, we see John the Baptist confront idolatry just like Elijah does. They both give people an opportunity to seek repentance, turn from their old ways, and worship the one true God. While God delivers his people in this story in 1 Kings, it's just a small glimpse of the redemption that will later come through Jesus.

Throughout all of Scripture, there is a pattern of God's people living in obedience, rejecting him, needing rescue, and then returning to obedience again. As we study other prophets over the next few weeks, we'll see the Israelites continue this pattern.

## Reflection

What characteristics of God did we see this week?

God shows his power in different ways throughout the story of Elijah. How is his power different in the dramatic fire versus the gentle whisper on Mount Horeb?

In what ways does Elijah's story point us to Jesus?

## NOTES

## NOTES





# HABAKKUK

Idolatry

## Setting

Judah (Southern Kingdom)

## Scripture

Habakkuk 1–3

## Theme of the Week

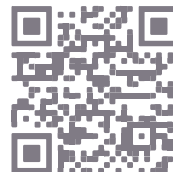
**Idolatry**

Idolatry is addressed both directly and indirectly as Habakkuk calls out the people's pride and misplaced trust in neighboring nations. He also rebukes their individual trust in obtaining power and wealth through false gods.

## Big Picture Narrative

Habakkuk speaks to themes of idolatry similar to other prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. Also, similar to the story of Exodus, God shows he can use idolatrous nations to fulfill his purposes. The story of idolatry in Habakkuk also contrasts with Christ, who is the ultimate one worthy of our worship. Jesus fulfills the hope Habakkuk expresses for God's justice and salvation.

Scan to watch  
The Bible Project's  
summary of Habakkuk:



## Day 1 | Habakkuk 1

This is the message that the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision.

Habakkuk's first  
complaint: why does  
God allow evil in  
Judah?

1

How long, O LORD, must I call for help?

But you do not listen!

“Violence is everywhere!” I cry,  
but you do not come to save.

Must I forever see these evil deeds?

Why must I watch all this misery?

Wherever I look,

I see destruction and violence.<sup>1</sup>

I am surrounded by people

who love to argue and fight.

The law has become paralyzed,

and there is no justice in the courts.

The wicked far outnumber the righteous,

so that justice has become perverted.

The LORD replied,

“Look around at the nations;

look and be amazed!

For I am doing something in your own day,

something you wouldn't believe

even if someone told you about it.

I am raising up the Babylonians<sup>2</sup>,

a cruel and violent people.

They will march across the world

and conquer other lands.

They are notorious for their cruelty

and do whatever they like.

Their horses are swifter than cheetahs

and fiercer than wolves at dusk.

Their charioteers charge from far away.

Like eagles, they swoop down to devour their prey.

“On they come, all bent on violence.

Their hordes advance like a desert wind,

God is raising Israel's  
enemy against them  
as discipline for Israel's  
rejection of God.

2

sweeping captives ahead of them like sand.  
 They scoff at kings and princes  
 and scorn all their fortresses.  
 They simply pile ramps of earth  
 against their walls and capture them!  
 They sweep past like the wind  
 and are gone.

But they are deeply guilty,  
 for their own strength is their god.<sup>3</sup>

O LORD my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal—  
 surely you do not plan to wipe us out?  
 O LORD, our Rock, you have sent these Babylonians to correct us,  
 to punish us for our many sins.  
 But you are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil.

Will you wink at their treachery?<sup>4</sup>  
 Should you be silent while the wicked  
 swallow up people more righteous than they?

Are we only fish to be caught and killed?  
 Are we only sea creatures that have no leader?  
 Must we be strung up on their hooks  
 and caught in their nets while they rejoice and celebrate?  
 Then they will worship their nets  
 and burn incense in front of them.  
 “These nets are the gods who have made us rich!”  
 they will claim.

Will you let them get away with this forever?<sup>5</sup>  
 Will they succeed forever in their heartless conquests?

**3** God is not doing this because the Babylonians have his favor; he is calling Israel back to himself.

**4** Habakkuk’s second complaint: how can God use an evil nation to accomplish his purpose?

**5** God will not let Babylon get away with evil. Just as God uses Babylon to bring justice to the people of Israel, Babylon will face justice for their evil as well.

## Reflection

What does chapter 1 reveal about God’s character?

# HABAKKUK

What tensions are present so far in Habakkuk?

How does it make you feel that God may allow painful things to happen to draw you back to himself?



## Day 2 | Habakkuk 2

I will climb up to my watchtower  
and stand at my guardpost.  
There I will wait to see what the LORD says  
and how he will answer my complaint.

Then the LORD said to me,<sup>1</sup>

“Write my answer plainly on tablets,  
so that a runner can carry the correct message to others.  
This vision is for a future time.  
It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled.  
If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently,  
for it will surely take place.  
It will not be delayed.

“Look at the proud!

They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked.<sup>2</sup>  
But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.

Wealth is treacherous,<sup>3</sup>

and the arrogant are never at rest.  
They open their mouths as wide as the grave,  
and like death, they are never satisfied.  
In their greed they have gathered up many nations  
and swallowed many peoples.

“But soon their captives will taunt them.

They will mock them, saying,  
‘What sorrow awaits you thieves!  
Now you will get what you deserve!

You’ve become rich by extortion,<sup>4</sup>  
but how much longer can this go on?’

Suddenly, your debtors will take action.  
They will turn on you and take all you have,  
while you stand trembling and helpless.  
Because you have plundered many nations,  
now all the survivors will plunder you.  
You committed murder throughout the countryside  
and filled the towns with violence.

**1** The Lord responds to Habakkuk’s second complaint and begins revealing the heart of men who have been distracted by idols.

**2** God warns against being prideful.

**3** God warns against wealth and its distraction.

**4** Not only is wealth deceptive, but the source of their wealth is not honest.

# HABAKKUK

There is no true  
security outside of  
God himself.

5

“What sorrow awaits you who build big houses  
with money gained dishonestly!  
You believe your wealth will buy security,<sup>5</sup>  
putting your family’s nest beyond the reach of danger.  
But by the murders you committed,  
you have shamed your name and forfeited your lives.  
The very stones in the walls cry out against you,  
and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint.

The book of  
Ecclesiastes explores  
how hard work often  
seems meaningless  
and how easily  
distracted our human  
hearts can be.

6

“What sorrow awaits you who build cities  
with money gained through murder and corruption!  
Has not the LORD of Heaven’s Armies promised  
that the wealth of nations will turn to ashes?  
They work so hard,  
but all in vain!<sup>6</sup>  
For as the waters fill the sea,  
the earth will be filled with an awareness  
of the glory of the LORD.

God warns against  
taking advantage of  
other people.

7

“What sorrow awaits you who make your neighbors drunk!  
You force your cup on them  
so you can gloat over their shameful nakedness.<sup>7</sup>  
But soon it will be your turn to be disgraced.  
Come, drink and be exposed!  
Drink from the cup of the LORD’s judgment,  
and all your glory will be turned to shame.  
You cut down the forests of Lebanon.  
Now you will be cut down.  
You destroyed the wild animals,  
so now their terror will be yours.  
You committed murder throughout the countryside  
and filled the towns with violence.

God calls out their  
worship of idols.  
Nobody is worthy of  
worship besides the  
one true God.

8

“What good is an idol carved by man,  
or a cast image that deceives you?  
How foolish to trust in your own creation—  
a god that can’t even talk!<sup>8</sup>  
What sorrow awaits you who say to wooden idols,  
‘Wake up and save us!’  
To speechless stone images you say,  
‘Rise up and teach us!’

Can an idol tell you what to do?  
They may be overlaid with gold and silver,  
but they are lifeless inside.  
But the LORD is in his holy Temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before him.”<sup>9</sup>

**9** The Lord is contrasted to the man-made idols the people are worshiping. God proves himself far more powerful than any other god. He alone deserves our reverence and praise.

## Reflection

The Lord warns against being proud, against wealth, and against taking advantage of others. What do these warnings reveal about the heart of God?

What attributes of God are present in this chapter of Habakkuk?

Think about your personal relationship with the Lord. Do you think you take him seriously?

- What are some ways you could grow in this area?

## Day 3 | Habakkuk 3

This prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk:

**1** Habakkuk recalls God's faithfulness and remembers that even in hard times, God will keep his promises.

**2** Anger is not the only characteristic of God. Habakkuk calls on the mercy of God in the midst of his anger.

**3** God is the Creator of all things. All of creation and all people will ultimately bow to him as Lord.

**4** Habakkuk recalls specific moments of God's faithfulness.

I have heard all about you, LORD.

I am filled with awe by your amazing works.

In this time of our deep need,

help us again as you did in years gone by.<sup>1</sup>

And in your anger,

remember your mercy.<sup>2</sup>

I see God moving across the deserts from Edom,  
the Holy One coming from Mount Paran.

His brilliant splendor fills the heavens,

and the earth is filled with his praise.

His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise.

Rays of light flash from his hands,

where his awesome power is hidden.

Pestilence marches before him;

plague follows close behind.

When he stops, the earth shakes.

When he looks, the nations tremble.<sup>3</sup>

He shatters the everlasting mountains

and levels the eternal hills.

He is the Eternal One!

I see the people of Cushan in distress,

and the nation of Midian trembling in terror.

Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers

and parted the sea?

Were you displeased with them?

No, you were sending your chariots of salvation!<sup>4</sup>

You brandished your bow

and your quiver of arrows.

You split open the earth with flowing rivers.

The mountains watched and trembled.

Onward swept the raging waters.

The mighty deep cried out,

lifting its hands in submission.

The sun and moon stood still in the sky

as your brilliant arrows flew

and your glittering spear flashed.



You marched across the land in anger  
and trampled the nations in your fury.

You went out to rescue your chosen people,<sup>5</sup>  
to save your anointed ones.

You crushed the heads of the wicked  
and stripped their bones from head to toe.

With his own weapons,  
you destroyed the chief of those  
who rushed out like a whirlwind,  
thinking Israel would be easy prey.

You trampled the sea with your horses,  
and the mighty waters piled high.

I trembled inside when I heard this;  
my lips quivered with fear.

My legs gave way beneath me,  
and I shook in terror.

I will wait quietly for the coming day  
when disaster will strike the people who invade us.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms,  
and there are no grapes on the vines;

even though the olive crop fails,  
and the fields lie empty and barren;

even though the flocks die in the fields,  
and the cattle barns are empty,

yet I will rejoice in the Lord!

I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!<sup>7</sup>

The Sovereign LORD is my strength!

He makes me as surefooted as a deer,  
able to tread upon the heights.

**5** Habakkuk recalls the great Exodus—Pharaoh and Babylon both brought destruction. In both cases, Israel needs the Lord to intervene on their behalf.

**6** After remembering, Habakkuk looks forward with assurance that the Lord will rescue them.

**7** He will rejoice because of the Lord, not his circumstances.

# HABAKKUK

## Reflection

Like Habakkuk, we must regularly practice remembering God's faithfulness. Spend a few minutes writing down times in your life when the Lord has been faithful.

How does looking back at the Lord's faithfulness help you to look forward with confidence?

## Day 4

Once again, God's people have turned their backs on him and have chosen to worship other gods. This theme is present throughout the Old Testament. From the very beginning, God called his people to live set apart from the rest of the world. Judah and Babylon put their trust in human strength, wealth, conquest, and being their own god. God's people were living like the other nations—not as God's holy people.

How often is this true for us as well? We know God wants complete obedience from us, and yet, we often chase our own dreams instead of what God wants for us. When Jesus comes to redeem God's people, he bridges a gap that we are unable to bridge ourselves. Our sin will always separate us from God, but because of Jesus' life and death, we have the ability to be in right relationship with God despite our brokenness.

While this is great news for all of God's people, we still must fight the temptation to run after our own idols. We all have things in our lives begging for attention and affection. Maybe it's good grades in school, being the best on your sports team, having a lot of friends, or making a lot of money. It looks different for all of us, but it's important to how you spend your time, energy, and attention so you can fight to keep your worship and praise directed towards God and not yourself.

## Reflection

How does Habakkuk's view of God evolve throughout the book?

What are some modern idols that we trust in today, and how do they compare to the idols of Habakkuk's time?

What does it mean to “live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4) in your daily life?

## NOTES



## NOTES







# JEREMIAH

Difficult Obedience

## Setting

Exile

## Scripture

Jeremiah 1, 7, 25

## Theme of the Week

**Difficult Obedience**

Jeremiah is called to his role as a prophet at a young age. God makes it clear that his job will be to tell the people of the Lord's coming judgment and not to refrain from calling them out on their disobedience. Jeremiah will be telling world powers and leaders that they will face consequences for their actions. While God's plan for Jeremiah is clear, it will not be easy. There is a lot for us to learn from Jeremiah around being obedient even when it's hard.

## Big Picture Narrative

The book of Jeremiah serves as an example of God's judgment on sin contrasted with his unending love and promises of restoration through a new covenant which points us to Jesus' redemption.

Scan to watch  
The Bible Project's  
summary of Jeremiah:



1 This is the beginning of around 40 years of ministry work that Jeremiah does in his life.

2 There were not many good kings of Israel throughout history, but Josiah cares about the people of Israel being obedient and works hard to purify them of idolatry.

3 This revelation is not to flatter Jeremiah but to encourage him to enter his calling with confidence and assurance. His work is not just for Judah but for the nations as well!

4 Most believe Jeremiah is 20 years old in chapter 1. Jeremiah is concerned about his youth when delivering the words of the Lord to the people. Age is not a reason to reject God's calling for you. (1 Timothy 4:12)

5 God promises Jeremiah that he will be sustained by strength from God alone. He does not see Jeremiah's weaknesses as a hurdle.

6 God will provide protection as Jeremiah speaks boldly against powerful nations. Jeremiah will also empower and encourage others.

7 The almond tree symbolizes hope and a promise of God's watchfulness

8 The boiling water symbolizes coming judgment to the people of Judah.

## Day 1 | Jeremiah 1

These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah,<sup>1</sup> one of the priests from the town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The LORD first gave messages to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah<sup>2</sup> son of Amon, king of Judah. The Lord's messages continued throughout the reign of King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, until the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons. In August of that eleventh year the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives.

The LORD gave me this message:

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb.  
Before you were born I set you apart  
and appointed you as my prophet to the nations."<sup>3</sup>

"O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"<sup>4</sup>

The Lord replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you."<sup>5</sup> I, the LORD, have spoken!" Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said,

"Look, I have put my words in your mouth!  
Today I appoint you to stand up  
against nations and kingdoms.  
Some you must uproot and tear down,  
destroy and overthrow.  
Others you must build up  
and plant."<sup>6</sup>

Then the LORD said to me, "Look, Jeremiah! What do you see?"

And I replied, "I see a branch from an almond tree."<sup>7</sup>

And the LORD said, "That's right, and it means that I am watching, and I will certainly carry out all my plans."

Then the Lord spoke to me again and asked, "What do you see now?"

And I replied, "I see a pot of boiling water, spilling from the north."<sup>8</sup>

"Yes," the LORD said, "for terror from the north will boil out on the people of this land. Listen! I am calling the armies of the kingdoms of the north to come to Jerusalem. I, the LORD, have spoken!

"They will set their thrones  
at the gates of the city.  
They will attack its walls  
and all the other towns of Judah.

I will pronounce judgment  
on my people for all their evil—  
for deserting me and burning incense to other gods.  
Yes, they worship idols made with their own hands!<sup>9</sup>

**9** Once again, the people of Israel have given way to their chronic idolatry.

“Get up and prepare for action.  
Go out and tell them everything I tell you to say.  
Do not be afraid of them,  
or I will make you look foolish in front of them.  
For see, today I have made you strong<sup>10</sup>  
like a fortified city that cannot be captured,  
like an iron pillar or a bronze wall.  
You will stand against the whole land—  
the kings, officials, priests, and people of Judah.  
They will fight you, but they will fail.  
For I am with you, and I will take care of you.<sup>11</sup>  
I, the LORD, have spoken!”

**10** By the Lord’s strength alone, Jeremiah has a mission to do, a call to action.

**11** The Lord goes before Jeremiah, giving him confidence and assurance to fulfill the mission he has been given.

## Reflection

What characteristics of God are evident in today’s passage?

In today’s reading, there is imagery of an almond tree and boiling water. How do these two things contrast characteristics of God without contradicting who he is?

In what ways have you felt like your age and youth have held you back in obedience to the Lord?

1 This message is for God's people. Those coming to worship in the Temple will be rebuked for their misdirected attention and wayward hearts.

2 God demands a complete change of his people's hearts. He will not accept a partial turning, only full repentance.

3 God cares about the state of his people's hearts. Going through the motions of worship while your heart is allegiant to other things is not true worship of God. He does not want our partial attention.

4 Jesus will quote this line in Mark 11:17 when he drives corruption from the Temple.

5 Corruption is often disguised. God is clear that no evil gets by him.

## Day 2 | Jeremiah 7

The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, "Go to the entrance of the LORD's Temple, and give this message to the people: 'O Judah, listen to this message from the LORD! Listen to it, all of you who worship here!' This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says:

"Even now, if you quit your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land. But don't be fooled by those who promise you safety simply because the LORD's Temple is here. They chant, 'The LORD's Temple is here! The LORD's Temple is here!' But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice;<sup>2</sup> only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshipping idols. Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.

"Don't be fooled into thinking that you will never suffer because the Temple is here. It's a lie! Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and burn incense to Baal and all those other new gods of yours, and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, 'We are safe!'—only to go right back to all those evils again?<sup>3</sup> Don't you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves?<sup>4</sup> Surely I see all the evil going on there.<sup>5</sup> I, the Lord, have spoken!

"Go now to the place at Shiloh where I once put the Tabernacle that bore my name. See what I did there because of all the wickedness of my people, the Israelites. While you were doing these wicked things, says the LORD, I spoke to you about it repeatedly, but you would not listen. I called out to you, but you



refused to answer. So just as I destroyed Shiloh, I will now destroy this Temple that bears my name, this Temple that you trust in for help, this place that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will send you out of my sight into exile, just as I did your relatives, the people of Israel.”<sup>6</sup>

“Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, and don’t beg me to help them, for I will not listen to you. Don’t you see what they are doing throughout the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? No wonder I am so angry! Watch how the children gather wood and the fathers build sacrificial fires. See how the women knead dough and make cakes to offer to the Queen of Heaven. And they pour out liquid offerings to their other idol gods! Am I the one they are hurting?” asks the Lord. “Most of all, they hurt themselves, to their own shame.”<sup>7</sup>

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “I will pour out my terrible fury on this place. Its people, animals, trees, and crops will be consumed by the unquenchable fire of my anger.”

This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “Take your burnt offerings and your other sacrifices and eat them yourselves! When I led your ancestors out of Egypt, it was not burnt offerings and sacrifices I wanted from them. This is what I told them: ‘Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Do everything as I say, and all will be well!’”<sup>8</sup>

“But my people would not listen to me. They kept doing whatever they wanted, following the stubborn desires of their evil hearts. They went backward instead of forward. From the day your ancestors left Egypt until now, I have continued to send my servants, the prophets—day in and day out. But my people have not listened to me or even tried to hear. They have been stubborn and sinful—even worse than their ancestors.

“Tell them all this, but do not expect them to listen. Shout out your warnings, but do not expect them to respond. Say to them, ‘This is the nation whose people will not obey the Lord their God and who refuse to be taught. Truth has vanished from among them; it is no longer heard on their lips. Shave your head in mourning, and weep alone on the mountains. For the LORD has rejected and forsaken this generation that has provoked his fury.’

“The people of Judah have sinned before my very eyes,” says the LORD. “They have set up their abominable idols right in the Temple that bears my name, defiling it. They have built pagan shrines at Topheth, the garbage dump in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they burn their sons and daughters in the fire. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; it never even crossed my mind to command such a thing! So beware, for the time is coming,” says the Lord, “when that garbage dump will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. They will bury the bodies in Topheth until there is no more room for them. The bodies of my people will be food for the vultures and wild animals, and no one will be left to scare them away. I will put an end to the happy singing and laughter in the streets of Jerusalem. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will no longer be heard in the towns of Judah. The land will lie in complete desolation.

**6** Though it seems harsh, God calls his people to repentance repeatedly and gives them many chances to turn from their evil ways. As they continually choose other gods, he will allow destruction to come their way for their disobedience.

**7** God knows they are ultimately hurting themselves. Obedience to the Lord is not slavery, but their sin will lead them to destruction and pain.

**8** This is the covenant God made with his people. Their obedience in response to his love and protection of them. They have broken their end and now face the consequences of that.

# JEREMIAH

## Reflection

How does this chapter prove the need for Jesus to come?

What characteristics of God show up in this chapter of Jeremiah?

How is God's anger different from human anger? What motivates his anger?

## Day 3 | Jeremiah 25

This message for all the people of Judah came to Jeremiah from the Lord during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign over Judah. This was the year when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began his reign.

Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people in Judah and Jerusalem, “For the past twenty-three years—from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, until now—the Lord has been giving me his messages. I have faithfully passed them on to you, but you have not listened.<sup>1</sup>

“Again and again the Lord has sent you his servants, the prophets, but you have not listened or even paid attention. Each time the message was this: ‘Turn from the evil road you are traveling and from the evil things you are doing. Only then will I let you live in this land that the Lord gave to you and your ancestors forever.’<sup>2</sup> Do not provoke my anger by worshiping idols you made with your own hands. Then I will not harm you.’

“But you would not listen to me,” says the Lord. “You made me furious by worshiping idols you made with your own hands, bringing on yourselves all the disasters you now suffer. And now the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: Because you have not listened to me, I will gather together all the armies of the north under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon,<sup>3</sup> whom I have appointed as my deputy. I will bring them all against this land and its people and against the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy you and make you an object of horror and contempt and a ruin forever. I will take away your happy singing and laughter. The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will no longer be heard. Your millstones will fall silent, and the lights in your homes will go out. This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

“Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins,”<sup>4</sup> says the Lord. “I will make the country of the Babylonians a wasteland forever. I will bring upon them all the terrors I have promised in this book—all the penalties announced by Jeremiah against the nations. Many nations and great kings will enslave the Babylonians, just as they enslaved my people. I will punish them in proportion to the suffering they cause my people.”<sup>5</sup>

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled to the brim with my anger,<sup>6</sup> and make all the nations to whom I send you drink from it. When they drink from it, they will stagger, crazed by the warfare I will send against them.”

So I took the cup of anger from the Lord<sup>7</sup> and made all the nations drink from it—every nation to which the Lord sent me. I went to Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah, and their kings and officials drank from the cup. From that day until this, they have been a desolate ruin, an object of horror, contempt, and cursing. I gave the cup to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials, and all his people, along with all the foreigners living in that land. I also gave it to all the kings of the land of Uz and the kings of the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and what remains of Ashdod. Then I gave the cup to the nations of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, and the kings of Tyre and Sidon, and the kings of the

**1** For years, the Lord has sent warnings that did not change the heart of the people. Now, there will be judgment just as he said there would be.

God has been clear about the consequences of not repenting.

**3** Jeremiah predicts the coming judgment 20 years before it will occur.

**4** God also promises that he will not allow the destruction to last forever.

**5** God will not allow his people to suffer forever, and those who oppress them will be punished.

**6** The image of a cup filled to the brim symbolizes the wrath God has towards Israel.

**7** In Matthew 26:39, Jesus talks of this same cup as he looks ahead to the cross, praying that the Lord would take the cup from him.

regions across the sea. I gave it to Dedan, Tema, and Buz, and to the people who live in distant places. I gave it to the kings of Arabia, the kings of the nomadic tribes of the desert, and to the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media. And I gave it to the kings of the northern countries, far and near, one after the other—all the kingdoms of the world. And finally, the king of Babylon himself drank from the cup of the Lord's anger.

Then the Lord said to me, "Now tell them, 'This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: Drink from this cup of my anger. Get drunk and vomit; fall to rise no more, for I am sending terrible wars against you.' And if they refuse to accept the cup, tell them, 'The Lord of Heaven's Armies says: You have no choice but to drink from it. I have begun to punish Jerusalem, the city that bears my name. Now should I let you go unpunished? No, you will not escape disaster. I will call for war against all the nations of the earth. I, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!'"<sup>8</sup>

"Now prophesy all these things, and say to them,

"The Lord will roar against his own land  
from his holy dwelling in heaven."<sup>9</sup>

He will shout like those who tread grapes;

he will shout against everyone on earth.

His cry of judgment will reach the ends of the earth,

for the Lord will bring his case against all the nations.

He will judge all the people of the earth,

slaughtering the wicked with the sword.

I, the Lord, have spoken!"

This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says:

"Look! Disaster will fall upon nation after nation!

A great whirlwind of fury is rising

from the most distant corners of the earth!"

In that day those the Lord has slaughtered will fill the earth from one end to the other. No one will mourn for them or gather up their bodies to bury them. They will be scattered on the ground like manure.

Weep and moan, you evil shepherds!

Roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock!

The time of your slaughter has arrived;

you will fall and shatter like a fragile vase.

You will find no place to hide;

there will be no way to escape.

Listen to the frantic cries of the shepherds.

The leaders of the flock are wailing in despair,

for the Lord is ruining their pastures.

Peaceful meadows will be turned into a wasteland

8 No nation will escape the wrath of God. They will be punished for the destruction they have caused God's people.

9 Verse 30: They didn't listen to the word of the Lord before, but they will be forced to listen now.

by the Lord's fierce anger.  
He has left his den like a strong lion seeking its prey,  
and their land will be made desolate  
by the sword of the enemy  
and the Lord's fierce anger.

## Reflection

What characteristics of God do you see in today's reading?

How are these characteristics hard for you to understand or think about in relation to your life?

How is God's justice on display in Jeremiah 25?

## Day 4

While we only covered chapters of Jeremiah this week, we encourage you to study the rest of the book on your own. From the beginning, God calls Jeremiah to be his messenger for the people of Israel. At first, Jeremiah only sees his youth and weaknesses, but God empowers him to take steps towards obedience, and he delivers a powerful message to the people. Jeremiah warns and calls them to repentance, and God strengthens and protects him as he does so.

Jeremiah has an interesting message—it is clear that judgment is coming due to the sins of Judah, but it is equally clear about the new covenant that will follow. God doesn't leave his people in the dark about his plan. He tells them a Savior is coming who can make God and man's relationship right again, and he will be the best prophet there ever was. This man will come teaching, refining, and rebuking just like the prophets before, but his message will be greater and his power will be stronger.

Jeremiah was called to a life of boldness and obedience, and we have a role to play in God's Kingdom as well. Students, you need to have skin in the game. If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, it's time to figure out your role in the body of Christ. For example, it may be tempting to believe that serving in the church is for grown-ups, but there's a role for you to play too. At school, the way you treat others, the way you talk, and your attitude all point to who your heart loves most. Just like God empowered Jeremiah, he can empower you to stand firm in your faith and walk in obedience at a young age.

## Reflection

What can we learn from Jeremiah about standing firm in our faith and remaining obedient to the Lord amidst clear rejection?

What does the promise of a new covenant mean for these people?

What surprised you in the book of Jeremiah? Did anything stand out to you in this week's reading?





# MALACHI

God's Covenant Love

## Setting

Post-exile

## Scripture

Malachi 1–4

## Theme of the Week

**God's Covenant Love**

While God's people drift from his will time and time again, God stays true to his covenant all the way through the Old Testament and beyond. Malachi walks us through the tension of the disobedient Israelites compared to a God who is steadfastly faithful. He loves us so much that he promises a Savior who will be the salvation we could never provide for ourselves.

## Big Picture Narrative

The book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament before the Lord is silent for 400 years. The nation of Israel, once divided, is one nation again, but it's under the rule of the Persian empire. The prophet Malachi talks about the promise of a messenger who will one day be fulfilled in Jesus. The book is filled with the promise that God's people have eternal hope—those who love the Lord will be brought together in Heaven to praise his name forever.

Throughout the book, there are six disputes between God and Israel. God will make a statement of how Israel has dishonored him, and then Israel will give a defence for their actions. This pattern reveals the state of the human heart and how God relentlessly pursues us despite our disobedience.

Scan to watch  
The Bible Project's  
summary of Malachi:





The name Malachi means “messenger.”

Before showing Israel all the ways they have rejected him, God reminds them of his covenant love, which is not based on the actions of the recipient but is solely based on God’s promise to love his people unconditionally.

Jacob was renamed to “Israel” by God after receiving the birthright from his father, Isaac. Jacob would be the father of 12 sons who represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

God’s second dispute refers to Israel’s worship. They lack devotion to him as the Lord over their lives.

The priests are offering imperfect sacrifices. A part of the covenant between God and men, men are called to offer only the best animals as a sacrifice.

The practice of sacrifice is designed to take the heart of men from an unclean to a holy state. When they are unwilling to bring their best before the Lord, it reveals their unfaithful hearts towards God.

God says he would rather shut the doors of the Temple than have half-hearted devotion from his people.

God contrasts them with other nations (not his chosen people) who fear his name and worship him better than his own people.

The Lord reminds them why they bring the best sacrifices by stating who he is.

## Day 1 | Malachi 1

This is the message that the Lord gave to Israel through the prophet Malachi.<sup>1</sup>

“I have always loved you,”<sup>2</sup> says the Lord.

But you retort, “Really? How have you loved us?”

And the Lord replies, “This is how I showed my love for you: I loved your ancestor Jacob,<sup>3</sup> but I rejected his brother, Esau, and devastated his hill country. I turned Esau’s inheritance into a desert for jackals.”

Esau’s descendants in Edom may say, “We have been shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins.”

But the Lord of Heaven’s Armies replies, “They may try to rebuild, but I will demolish them again. Their country will be known as ‘The Land of Wickedness,’ and their people will be called ‘The People with Whom the Lord Is Forever Angry.’ When you see the destruction for yourselves, you will say, ‘Truly, the Lord’s greatness reaches far beyond Israel’s borders!’”

The Lord of Heaven’s Armies says to the priests: “A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve?”<sup>4</sup> You have shown contempt for my name!

“But you ask, ‘How have we ever shown contempt for your name?’

“You have shown contempt by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar.”<sup>5</sup>

“Then you ask, ‘How have we defiled the sacrifices?’

“You defile them by saying the altar of the Lord deserves no respect. When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn’t that wrong? And isn’t it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is!” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

“Go ahead, beg God to be merciful to you! But when you bring that kind of offering, why should he show you any favor at all?”<sup>6</sup> asks the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

“How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors<sup>7</sup> so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “and I will not accept your offerings. But my name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night. All around the world they offer sweet incense and pure offerings in honor of my name. For my name is great among the nations,”<sup>8</sup> says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

“But you dishonor my name with your actions. By bringing contemptible food, you are saying it’s all right to defile the Lord’s table. You say, ‘It’s too hard to serve the Lord,’ and you turn up your noses at my commands,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?” asks the Lord.

“Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord. For I am a great king,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “and my name is feared among the nations!”<sup>9</sup>

## Reflection

Israel viewed being under foreign reign as God abandoning them, but God reminds them that he loves them and will make everything right one day. He is disciplining them now, but justice will come for his people.

- Have you ever felt like the Lord was disciplining you?
- How did that shape your view of God?

Often, we make the mistake of looking to our circumstances as evidence of God's love. Where must we look for assurance of God's love instead?

God takes our worship seriously, wanting full, undivided devotion. Look at how God speaks to the Israelites about their worship. What does worship look like for you?

1 God warns the people of Israel time and time again that if they do not turn from their sin, he will bring judgment against them.

2 The tribe of Levi was the tribe of the priests.

3 God's words might seem harsh, but remember, he wants our obedience because he knows that is the way to true life.

4 Pay close attention to the critical role of spiritual leadership.

5 Disobedience reveals the state of our hearts and what we care most about.

6 Malachi shifts from talking to the priests and addresses everyone.

7 The men are marrying women from other nations that worshiped other gods. Now, the false gods are being introduced to God's people.

8 Their choice of marriage partner impacted every part of their lives, including their relationship with God.

9 Not only were they marrying the wrong women, but they were unloyal and divorcing them, furthering their disobedience to God's commands.

10 Clearly, these people have a heart problem. They aren't just rejecting him in one area; they are living lives that completely reject his commands.

## Day 2 | Malachi 2

"Listen, you priests—this command is for you! Listen to me and make up your minds to honor my name," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "or I will bring a terrible curse against you. I will curse even the blessings you receive.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you have not taken my warning to heart. I will punish your descendants and splatter your faces with the manure from your festival sacrifices, and I will throw you on the manure pile. Then at last you will know it was I who sent you this warning so that my covenant with the Levites<sup>2</sup> can continue," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

"The purpose of my covenant with the Levites was to bring life and peace,<sup>3</sup> and that is what I gave them. This required reverence from them, and they greatly revered me and stood in awe of my name. They passed on to the people the truth of the instructions they received from me. They did not lie or cheat; they walked with me, living good and righteous lives, and they turned many from lives of sin.

"The words of a priest's lips should preserve knowledge of God,<sup>4</sup> and people should go to him for instruction, for the priest is the messenger of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. But you priests have left God's paths. Your instructions have caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me<sup>5</sup> but have shown favoritism in the way you carry out my instructions."

Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God?<sup>6</sup> Then why do we betray each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?

Judah has been unfaithful, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The men of Judah have defiled the Lord's beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols.<sup>7</sup> May the Lord cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the Lord of Heaven's Armies.<sup>8</sup>

Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her,<sup>9</sup> though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife?<sup>10</sup> In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."

You have wearied the Lord with your words.

"How have we wearied him?" you ask.

You have wearied him by saying that all who do evil are good in the Lord's sight, and he is pleased with them. You have wearied him by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"<sup>11</sup>

## Reflection

This passage explores the heavy weight of spiritual leadership in the lives of believers. Our sin doesn't just affect us; it affects people around us as well. How have you seen your sin affect others? Who has been hurt by your disobedience?

**11** The Lord is weary of the people because he has proven himself faithful over and over, but the Israelites cannot see past their own circumstances.

How should your love for the Lord affect the way you love others in your life?

1 This messenger is John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2).

2 God promises a Savior will come.

3 Jesus will come to refine the religious leaders and his Temple.

4 All priests came from the tribe of Levi.

5 Your actions reveal what you believe is true about God.

6 This is assurance for God's people. Since God does not change, our identity does not waver either.

7 If the people will turn back to God, he will not withhold anything from them. He is ready to pour out his blessings on them.

8 When we forget who God is and stray from our identity as his children, it's easy to focus only on the physical circumstances we see and experience. Our minds wander, and we begin to believe the worst about God and his plans.

9 The faithful will be remembered and honored.

## Day 3 | Malachi 3–4

"Look! I am sending my messenger,<sup>1</sup> and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple.<sup>2</sup> The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

"But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal,<sup>3</sup> or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites,<sup>4</sup> refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. Then once more the Lord will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

"At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,"<sup>5</sup> says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

"I am the Lord, and I do not change.<sup>6</sup> That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

"But you ask, 'How can we return when we have never gone away?'

"Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!

"But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?'

"You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in!<sup>7</sup> Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

"You have said terrible things about me," says the Lord.

"But you say, 'What do you mean? What have we said against you?'

"You have said, 'What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord of Heaven's Armies that we are sorry for our sins? From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm.'<sup>8</sup>

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.<sup>9</sup>



“They will be my people,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “On the day when I act in judgment, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient child. Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”<sup>10</sup>

The Lord of Heaven’s Armies says, “The day of judgment is coming,”<sup>11</sup> burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.

“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. On the day when I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet,”<sup>12</sup> says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

“Remember to obey the Law of Moses,”<sup>13</sup> my servant—all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel.

“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah”<sup>14</sup> before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

## Reflection

What comfort comes from knowing that the Lord is unchanging?

**10** There will be a day when God’s justice is made clear and all will be made right.

**11** The Day of the Lord is mentioned throughout the Old Testament. For believers, this is a day of great hope and joy. For those that do not believe, this is a day of judgment.

**12** God’s people will not be oppressed forever.

**13** God gives them hope, and then he gives them a job to do in the meantime.

**14** As we learned the first week, Elijah was a great prophet who fought for God’s people. This verse refers to a greater Elijah—Jesus, the greater messenger and prophet who will be able to bring full salvation for God’s people once and for all.

# MALACHI

How do you find encouragement in the fact that God is quick to help those who are willing to repent?

How does the book of Malachi bring hope to God's people?

## Day 4

In a lot of ways, Malachi sums up the tension between God and his people that has lasted for the entire Old Testament. God expresses his frustrations and exposes the heart of the people. While there is a lot of talk of how they failed and continue in disobedience, there are also messages of hope and a promise that will be fulfilled.

In the end, it is clear that humanity cannot save themselves. God continually reveals that he has a greater plan for a Savior to come who will bring justice for the oppressed, rescue God's people from their own wickedness, and make all things right between God and his people. Malachi ends with a promise, but then God is silent for 400 years. Hope has been given, but first, they must wait.

Being a follower of Jesus creates a lot of tension. For the Israelites, there was clear tension between the promise they were given and the reality that it remained unfulfilled in their lives. Now, we get to live in the fulfillment of that promise, but we live in tension too. While we live after Jesus' resurrection, there is still more to come. Christ's work on the cross is finished, but a day is coming when he will return. Until then, we have work to do. God calls us to live obedient lives, spread the Good News to all, and patiently wait for Christ to come back for his final judgment. While we get to know Jesus personally, we still live with tension before he returns.

## Reflection

What characteristics of God did you see on display throughout the book of Malachi?

What does being faithful in the waiting look like for us?

## NOTES

## NOTES

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