



ZEPHANIAH, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI

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Read on your own or with others,
which ever you prefer.

This leaflet is just a brief overview of the 'big picture' of these books. If you have been reading the Bible for some time you will be aware there is much more to it than you'll find here.

If you are new to reading the Bible don't worry too much if there are details you do not quite get at the moment - focus on the 'big picture'.

INTRODUCTION

These four books are the last of the 12 Minor Prophets and are found at the end of our Old Testament. They give us God's message to Judah at three distinct eras in their history.

Zephaniah prophesied before the exile to Babylon. He lived around the time of Jeremiah while Josiah was King in Judah (Zephaniah 1:1).

Haggai and Zechariah were speaking during the time when the Jews returned from exile to build the temple. They are both mentioned in the book of Ezra which records the events of this time.

Malachi is a little later. He speaks about many of the same sins that are identified in the book of Nehemiah. This has led people to believe that he was a contemporary of Nehemiah and probably prophesied in between Nehemiah's two stints as governor in Jerusalem.

OVERVIEW

1. ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah was written after the northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians because they had turned away from God. The southern kingdom, Judah, hadn't learned from this. In Chapter 1 God reminds the people about a day when he will judge the whole earth. He warns the people of Judah that if they continue in their sin they will not escape (Zephaniah 1:12-13).

The middle of the book (Zephaniah 2:1-3:8) contains several statements of judgment on different nations. The bookends of this passage are a call from God to his people to repent and a statement of amazement that in the face of all that God has done they will continue in their sin (Zephaniah 3:7).

The book ends with a promise from God to restore a faithful remnant of his people. As with other promises like this in the prophets it is partially fulfilled as the people of Judah return from exile and re-build Jerusalem. However, it also points beyond this to Jesus and then to all who put their trust in him.

2. HAGGAI

When Haggai begins his ministry, the Jews have been back in Jerusalem for several years. The building of the temple has been stopped by King Artaxerxes and the people in Jerusalem were struggling.

God explains, through Haggai, that the reason for their struggles is that they are focusing on themselves and building their own wealth rather than on the worship of God and rebuilding his temple (Haggai 1:4). The people listen and it isn't long before the temple work starts up again (Ezra 5).

In Haggai 2, God promises to restore glory to his house and blessing to the people. As with the promise of restoration in Zephaniah, this promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

3. ZECHARIAH

Zechariah is a book that encourages God's people to continue to trust in him. Chapters 1-6 are a series of 8 visions to encourage the people. As you read each vision focus on the big picture rather than the meaning of every detail.

Chapters 7 & 8 deal with a specific question about fasting. In response, God raises questions of motive, reminds them why the land has become desolate and promises great blessing – a time when he will once again live with his people (Zechariah 8:3).

The last chapters of Zechariah are an encouragement to look beyond the building of the stone temple to God's future plans in Jesus Christ – the king and shepherd who will come.

4. MALACHI

The problems that Malachi are addressing are the problems of superficial or half-hearted religion. The worship of God had become shallow and the people are accused of just going through the motions.

This book reminds us that God takes our lives seriously even if we don't. The first three chapters are a series of complaints and warnings to the people. The last chapter reminds us of the certainty of judgment, but also of the hope for those who genuinely put their trust in God (Malachi 4:2).

Malachi contains one particular verse that should encourage us as we come each month to discuss the books we've been reading.

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. Malachi 3:16 (NIV84)

ASKING THE QUESTIONS THE BIBLE WANTS YOU TO ASK

What does this book teach you about Jesus? (Luke 24:45-47)

What does this book teach you about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you encouraged? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you corrected? (Romans 15:4)

What difference do the truths of this book make in your life (Matthew 7:24-27)