



# ZERUBBABEL

The Forerunner

# The Author?

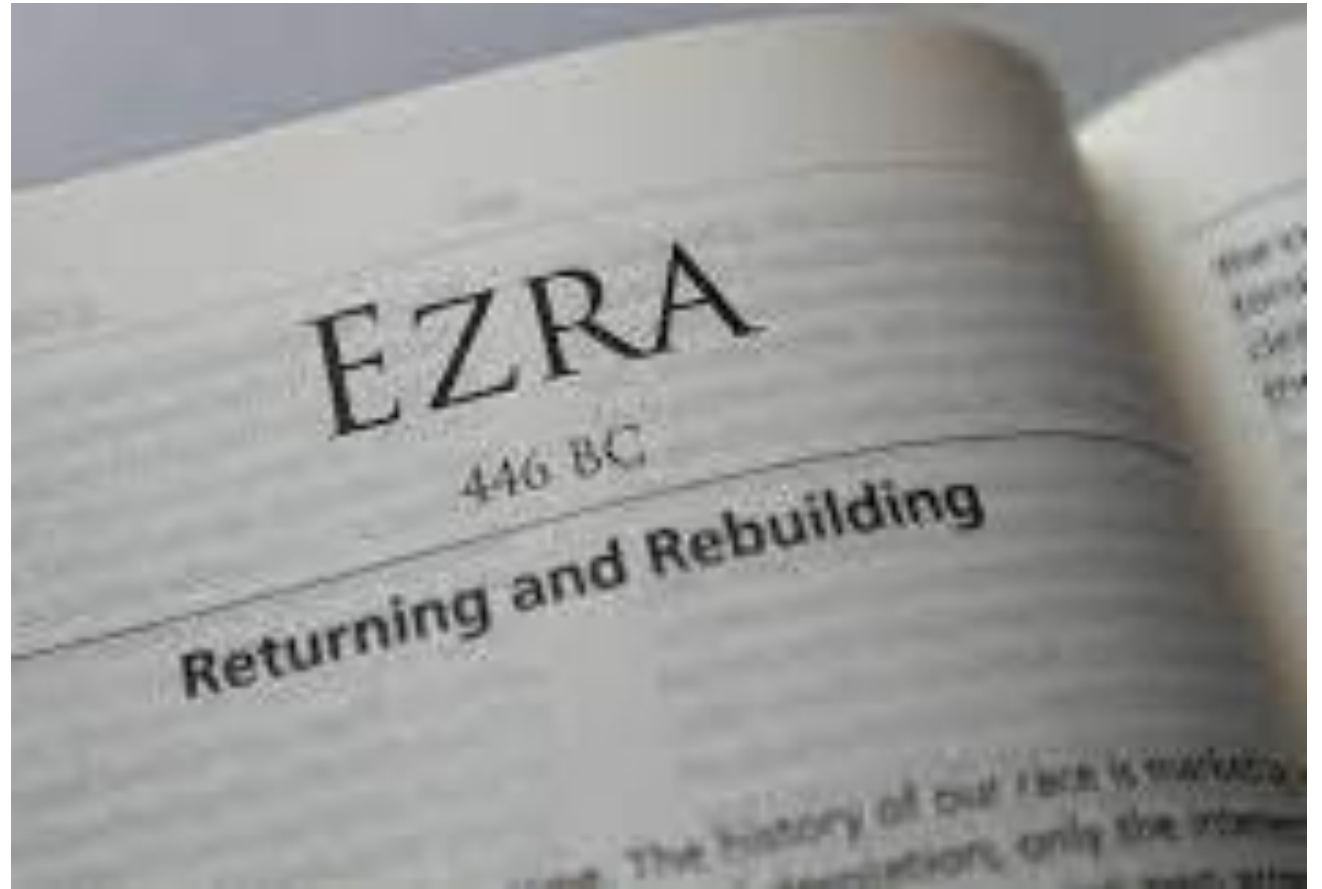
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- **Who wrote the book?**
- Jewish tradition has long attributed authorship of this historical book to the scribe and scholar Ezra,
- who led the second group of Jews returning from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11–26).
- Ezra 8 includes a first-person reference, implying the author's participation in the events.
- He plays a major role in the second half of the book, as well as in the book of Nehemiah, its sequel.
- In the Hebrew Bible, the two books were considered one work,
- though some internal evidence suggests they were written separately and joined together in the Hebrew canon (and separated again in English translations).



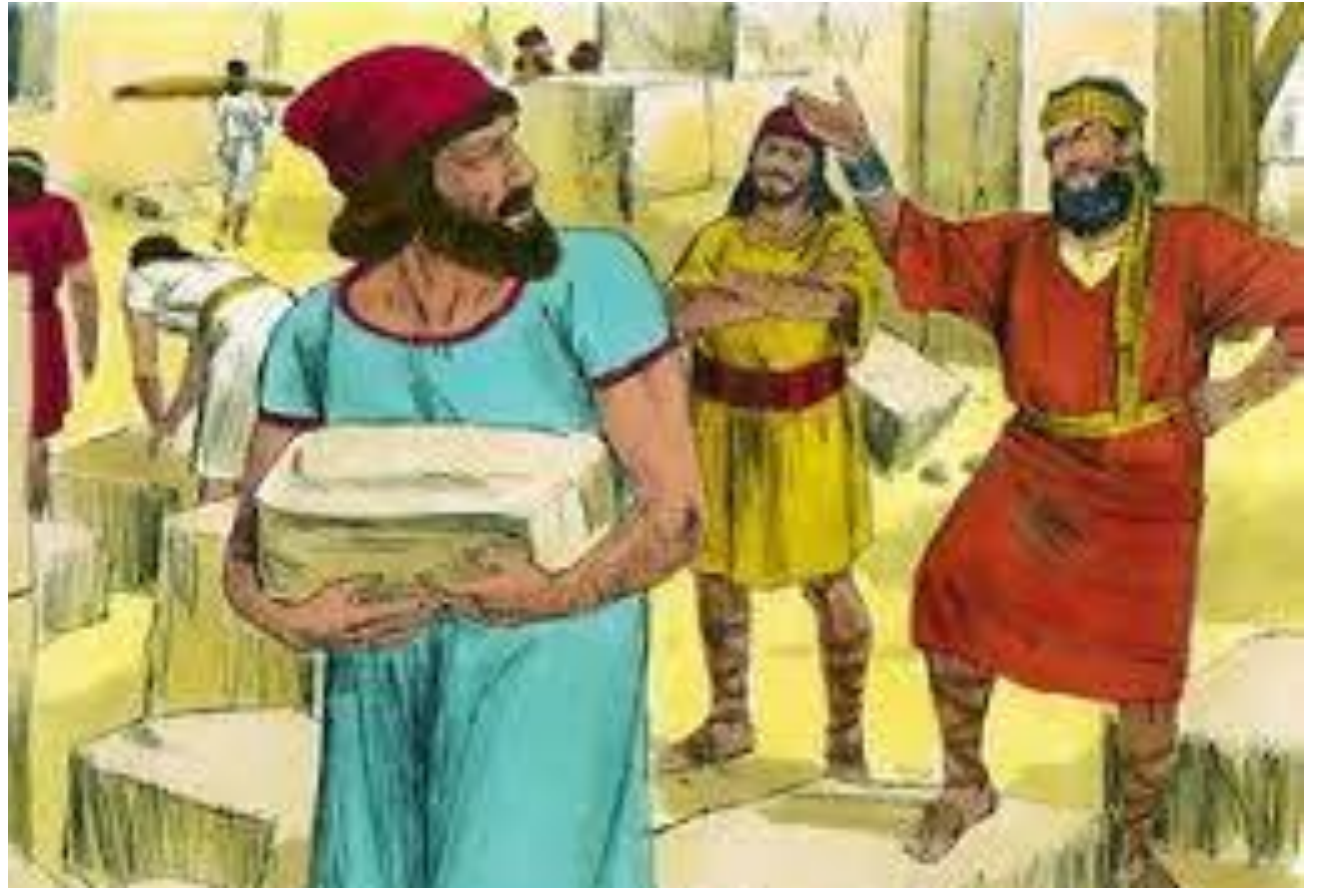
# Author...?

- Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron the chief priest (7:1–5),
- thus, he was a priest and scribe in his own right.
- His zeal for God and God's Law spurred Ezra to lead a group of Jews back to Israel during King Artaxerxes's reign over the Persian Empire
- (which had since replaced the Babylonian Empire that originally exiled the people of Judah).



# Zerubbabel....

- The book of Ezra records two separate time periods directly following the seventy years of Babylonian captivity.
- Ezra 1–6 covers the first return of Jews from captivity, led by Zerubbabel—a period of twenty-three years beginning with the edict of Cyrus of Persia and ending at the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (538–515 BC).
- Ezra 7–10 picks up the story more than sixty years later, when Ezra led the second group of exiles to Israel (458 BC).
- The book could not have been completed earlier than about 450 BC (the date of the events recorded in 10:17–44).
- The events in Ezra are set in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The returning exiles were able to populate only a tiny portion of their former homeland.







# EZRA

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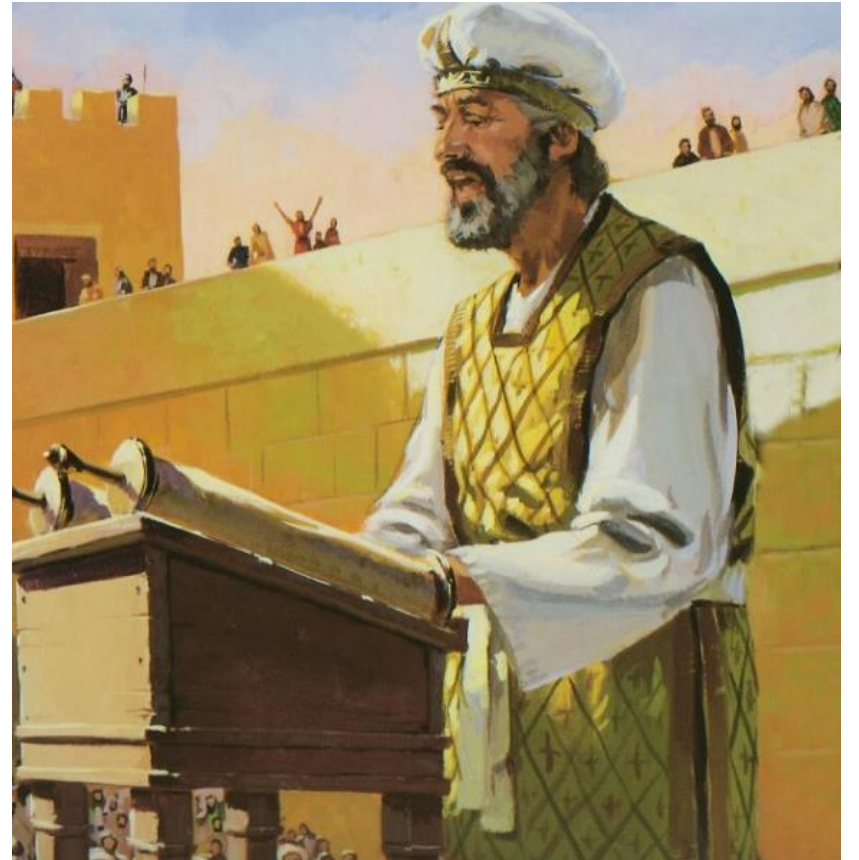
The Priest Builder



# Ezra...

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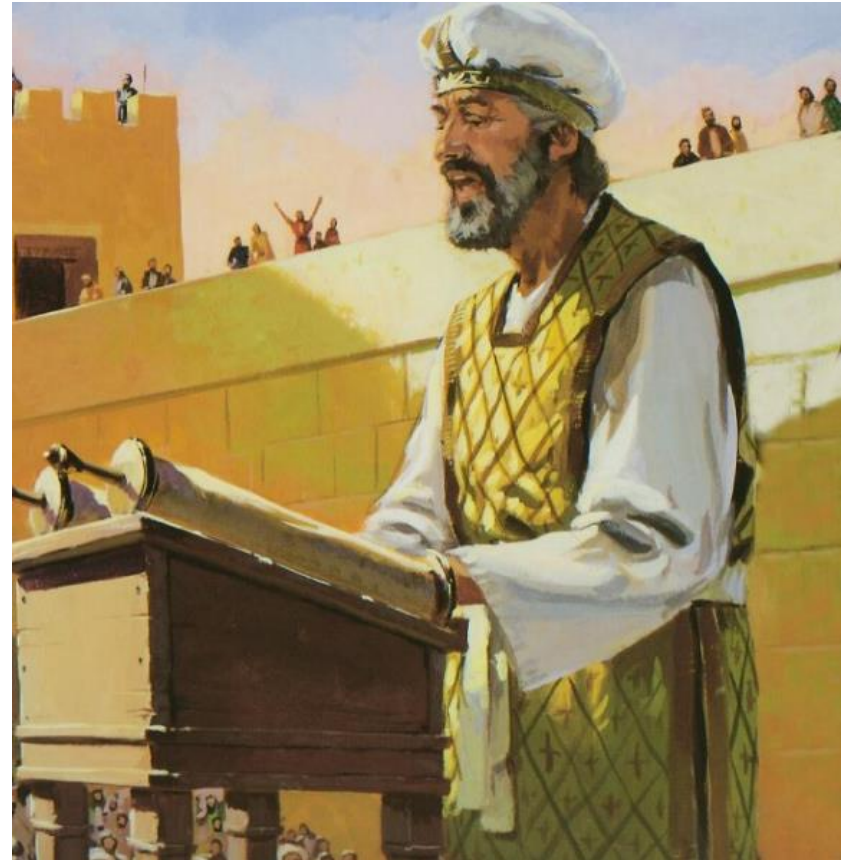
- **Why is Ezra so important?**
- The book of Ezra provides a much-needed link in the historical record of the Israelite people.
- When their king was dethroned and captured and the people exiled to Babylon, Judah as an independent nation ceased to exist.
- The book of Ezra provides an account of the Jews' regathering, of their struggle to survive and to rebuild what had been destroyed.
- Through his narrative, Ezra declared that they were still God's people and that God had not forgotten them.



# Ezra...

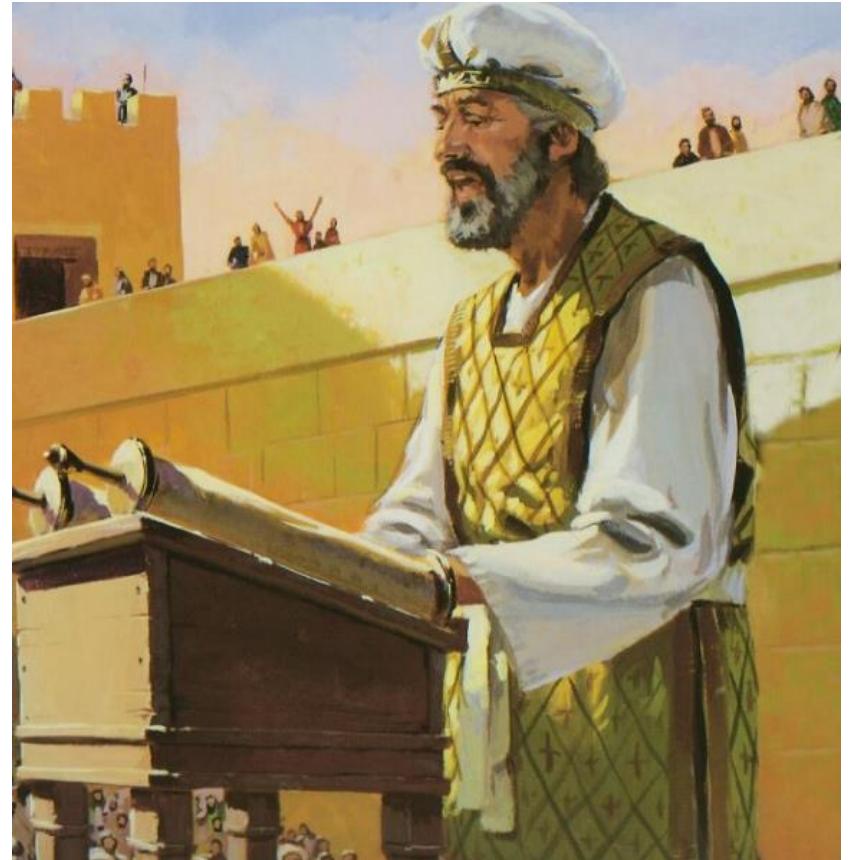
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- In the book of Ezra we witness the rebuilding of the new temple,
- the unification of the returning tribes as they shared common struggles and were challenged to work together.
- Later, after the original remnant had stopped work on the city walls and spiritual apathy ruled,
- Ezra arrived with another two thousand people and sparked a spiritual revival.
- By the end of the book, Israel had renewed its covenant with God and had begun acting in obedience to Him.
- Ezra also contains one of the great intercessory prayers of the Bible ([Ezra 9:5–15](#) see [Daniel 9](#) and [Nehemiah 9](#) for others).
- His leadership proved crucial to the Jews' spiritual advancement.

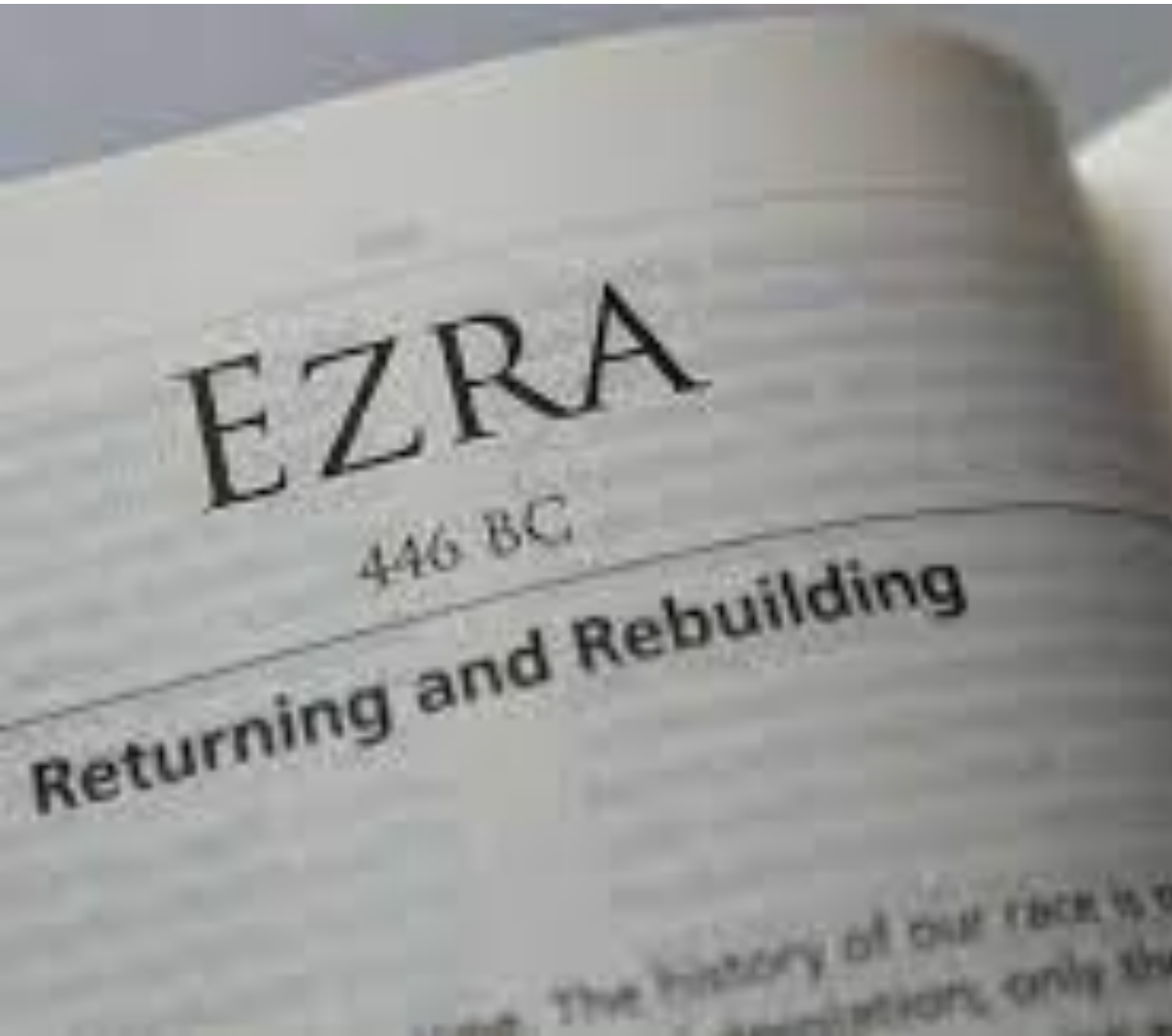




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- **What's the big idea?**
  - Ezra's narrative reveals two main issues faced by the returning exiles:
    - (1) the struggle to restore the temple (Ezra 1:1–6:22 and
    - (2) the need for spiritual reformation (7:1–10:44). Both were necessary in order for the people to renew their fellowship with the Lord.
  - A broader theological purpose is also revealed: God keeps His promises.
  - Through the prophets, God had ordained that His chosen people would return to their land after a seventy-year exile.
  - Ezra's account proclaims that God kept His word, and it shows that when God's people remained faithful to Him, He would continue to bless them.
  - Hence, the book emphasizes the temple and proper worship, similar to Chronicles (which was also written during these days).







## Application....

- **How do I apply this?**
- God moved the hearts of secular rulers (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) to allow, even encourage and help, the Jewish people to return home.
- He used these unlikely allies to fulfill His promises of restoration for His chosen people.
- Have you encountered unlikely sources of blessing?
- Have you wondered how God can really work all things together for the good of those who are called by His name ([Romans 8:28](#))?
- Take time today to acknowledge God's sovereignty and mercy in your life. Recommit to Him your trust, your love, and your obedience.

An illustration depicting two men in ancient attire. The man on the left, Nehemiah, has a thick dark beard and is wearing a blue turban with a yellow band, a blue tunic, and a yellow shawl. He is smiling slightly as he looks at a large white scroll held by both men. The man on the right has a beard and is wearing a red and yellow striped turban and a red tunic. He has a serious expression. In the background, a woman in a white dress leads a dark donkey, and a person is climbing a wooden ladder against a stone wall.

# NEHEMIAH

The Leader's Leader

# Author...?

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- Jewish tradition identifies Nehemiah himself as the primary author of this historical book.
- Much of the book is written from his first-person perspective. Nothing is known about his youth or background;
- we meet him as an adult serving in the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11–2:1).
- This prestigious position reveals something of Nehemiah's upright character. Though he remained in Persia after the exiles had been allowed to go home, he was highly interested in the state of affairs in Judah (his brother Hanani [1:2] had returned there earlier).
- The book of Nehemiah could be read as a sequel to the book of Ezra, and some scholars believe the two were originally one work. It is possible that Ezra compiled Nehemiah's original accounts with other material to create the book of Nehemiah. However, most scholars believe the book was written by Nehemiah.





# Where are we?

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- The book of Nehemiah opens in the Persian city of Susa in the year 444 BC.
- Later that year, Nehemiah traveled to Israel, leading the third of three returns by the Jewish people following their seventy years of exile in Babylon.
- (The previous chapter on Ezra describes the earlier two returns.) Most of the book centers on events in Jerusalem.
- The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly thereafter.
- Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament.
- Although the book of Esther appears after Nehemiah in the canon, the events in Esther occurred in the time period between [Ezra 6](#) and [7](#), between the first and second returns of the people to Israel.
- The prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah.



# Why is Nehemiah important?

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- Nehemiah was a layman, not a priest like Ezra nor a prophet like Malachi.
- He served the Persian king in a secular position before leading a group of Jews to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the city walls.
- “Nehemiah’s expertise in the king’s court equipped him adequately for the political and physical reconstruction necessary for the remnant to survive.”<sup>1</sup>
- Under Nehemiah’s leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal.
- Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in a palace for hard labour in a politically insignificant district.
- He partnered with Ezra, who also appears in this book, to solidify the political and spiritual foundations of the people. Nehemiah’s humility before God (see his moving intercessory prayers in chapters 1 and 9) provided an example for the people.
- He did not claim glory for himself but always gave God the credit for his successes.



# What's the big idea?

- Nehemiah recorded the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city.
- Together, he and Ezra, who led the spiritual revival of the people, directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity.
- Nehemiah's life provides a fine study on leadership. He overcame opposition from outsiders as well as internal turmoil.
- He exercised his administrative skills in his strategy to use half the people for building while the other half kept watch for the Samaritans who, under Sanballat, threatened attack ([Nehemiah 4–7](#)).
- As governor, Nehemiah negotiated peace among the Jews who were unhappy with Persian taxes. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goals. Accomplishing those goals resulted in a people encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future.





# How do I apply this

- The book of Nehemiah shows us the kind of significant impact one individual can have on a nation.
- Nehemiah served in secular offices, using his position to bring back to the Jews order, stability, and proper focus on God.
- God uses all manner of people in all manner of places doing all manner of work.
- Do you feel you must be “in ministry” in order to serve God?
- Be encouraged; He is not limited by your vocation. In fact, God has placed you where you are for a purpose.
- Have this attitude about your work: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” ([Colossians 3:17](#)).





# HAGGAI

The Encouraging Prophet

# Author...?

- The prophet Haggai recorded his four messages to the Jewish people of Jerusalem in 520 BC,
- eighteen years after their return from exile in Babylon (538 BC).
- Haggai 2:3 seems to indicate that the prophet had seen Jerusalem before the destruction of the temple and the exile in 586 BC, meaning he was more than seventy years old by the time he delivered his prophecies.
- From these facts, the picture of Haggai begins to come into focus.
- He was an older man looking back on the glories of his nation, a prophet imbued with a passionate desire to see his people rise up from the ashes of exile and reclaim their rightful place as God's light to the nations.







# Haggai...

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- Haggai's prophecy came at a time when the people of Judah were extremely vulnerable.
- They had been humbled by their exile to Babylon, hopeful in their return to their Promised Land,
- and then so discouraged by opposition in their rebuilding of the temple that they had quit (Ezra 4:24).
- Now, sixteen years later, with Haggai blaming their lack of food, clothing, and shelter on their failure to rebuild the temple,
- the Jews were receptive to his message of rebuilding the Lord's house.

# Haggai...

- Unlike most of the other prophets, Haggai explicitly dated his prophecies, down to the day.
- He gave four separate messages, the first on August 29, 520 BC (Haggai 1:1);
- the second on October 17, 520 BC (2:1);
- and the final two on December 18, 520 BC (2:10, 20).
- These messages encouraged the people of Judah to finish building the temple and to have hope in God for the promise of blessings in the future.







# Haggai...

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- **Why is Haggai so important?**
- After thousands of years, the book of Haggai remains largely unique among the books of Old Testament prophets for one key reason:
- the people of Judah listened!
- Haggai's message to rebuild the temple was passionate, simple, and straightforward ([Haggai 1:8](#)).
- No one could mistake whether or not his direction had been followed—the results would be evident for all the people to see.
- Through the physical act of rebuilding the temple, the people began to indicate a shift in their spiritual lives:
- from devotion to self toward devotion to God.



# Haggai...

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- **What's the big idea?**
- Haggai had an important message for the Jews who had recently returned from exile.
- They had forgotten their God, choosing instead to focus on their own interests,
- so it was time for them to “consider [their] ways” (Haggai 1:5, 7).
- Nothing was more important for the Jews than to show that the Lord was at the centre of their thoughts and actions,
- so Haggai directed them to finish rebuilding God’s temple.



# Haggai...

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- However, rather than leaving them alone with the task of rebuilding,
- Haggai continued to preach to the Jews, encouraging them with the hope of future glory in the temple and a victory to come over the enemies of God's people (2:7–9, 21–22).
- According to Haggai's message, if the people would place God at the center of their lives, they would realize the future blessings that God had in store for His people.



# Application...

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- **How do I apply this?**
- The Jews who emigrated from Babylon to their original homeland of Judah faced intense opposition,
- both external and internal. Ezra 4:1–5 records the external resistance to the project of rebuilding the temple.
- The enemies of Judah first attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the builders, and when that didn't work, they resorted to scare tactics.
- Haggai, on the other hand, focused on the internal opposition they faced, namely from their own sin.
- The Jews had thoughtlessly placed their own interests before the Lord's interests, looking after their own safety and security without giving consideration to the status of the Lord's house.





# Application...

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- Haggai's encouragement to rebuild the temple in the face of the Jews' neglect brings to mind
- the apostle Paul's exhortation to Christians to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10–17).
- Are you building a life that reflects your status as a temple of the Holy Spirit,
- leaving a legacy that will stand the test of time?
- Find encouragement for that construction project in the four passionate sermons from this Old Testament prophet.





# ZECHARIAH

The Supportive Prophet



# Author...

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- **Who wrote the book?**
- Grandson of the priest Iddo, Zechariah prophesied to the people of Judah after they returned from their seventy years of exile in Babylon ([Zechariah 1:1](#); [Nehemiah 12:1, 4, 16](#)).
- Zechariah's grandfather returned from Babylon, his young grandson in tow, with the first group of Israelites allowed back, in 538 BC under the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia. Because of his family lineage, Zechariah was a priest in addition to a prophet.
- He, therefore, would have had an intimate familiarity with the worship practices of the Jews, even if he had never served in a completed temple.
- As a “young man” at the time of his first prophecies ([Zechariah 2:4](#)), his life more than likely extended into the reign of Xerxes I (485–465 BC), the king best known in the Bible for making Esther the queen of Persia ([Esther 1:1](#)).<sup>1</sup>



# Zechariah...

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- **Where are we?**
- Zechariah, a young man, especially when compared to his contemporary Haggai,
- came alongside the older prophet to deliver messages from the Lord to the Jewish remnant recently returned from Babylon.
- While Haggai's overall message had more of a cautionary tone to it (pointing out the Jews' sin and self-focus),
- Zechariah emphasized a tone of encouragement to the struggling Israelites trying to rebuild their temple.





# Zechariah..

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- Zechariah's dated visions and messages in chapters 1–8 all take place in the same general time period as Haggai's, beginning in October–November 520 BC with a call for the people of Judah to repent ([Zechariah 1:1](#)).
- He then received eight visions on the restless night of February 15, 519 BC (1:7), followed by four messages that he preached on December 7, 518 BC (7:1).
- Though his final messages in chapters 9–14 go undated, the mention of Greece in 9:13 suggests the prophecies came much later in his life,
- presumably sometime in the 480s BC, before Ezra (458 BC) and Nehemiah (444 BC) arrived to again revitalize the Jewish people.



# Zechariah...

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- **Why is Zechariah so important?**
- The book of Zechariah contains the clearest and the largest number of messianic (about the Messiah) passages among the Minor Prophets.
- In that respect, it's possible to think of the book of Zechariah as a kind of miniature book of Isaiah.
- Zechariah pictures Christ in both His first coming (Zechariah 9:9)
- and His second coming (9:10–10:12). Jesus will come, according to Zechariah, as Saviour, Judge,
- and ultimately, as the righteous King ruling His people from Jerusalem (14:8–9).



# Zechariah..

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- **What's the big idea?**
- Meaning “Yahweh remembers,” Zechariah’s name was appropriate to the purpose of his prophecies.<sup>2</sup>
- His book brims over with the hope that God would remember His promises to His people, even after all the time they spent outside the land.
- The prophet used a simple structure of eight visions (Zechariah 1:1–6:15), four messages (7:1–8:23), and two oracles (9:1–14:21) to anticipate the completion of the temple
- and, ultimately, the future reign of the Messiah from Jerusalem.
- Like many of the prophets, Zechariah saw isolated snapshots of the future; therefore, certain events that seem to occur one right after the other in Zechariah’s prophecy actually often have generations or even millennia between them.





# Zechariah...

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- For a people newly returned from exile, Zechariah provided specific prophecy about their immediate and distant future—
- no doubt a great encouragement. Their nation would still be judged for sin (5:1–11),
- but they would also be cleansed and restored (3:1–10), and God would rebuild His people (1:7–17). Zechariah concluded his book by looking into the distant future,
- first at the rejection of the Messiah by Israel (9:1–11:17), and then at His eventual reign when Israel will finally be delivered (12:1–14:21).



# Application...

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- **How do I apply this?**
- Have you struggled with discouragement?
- Read Zechariah. While the book contains its share of judgments on the people of Judah and beyond,
- it overflows with hope in the future reign of the Lord over His people.
- It's easy to get caught up in the oftentimes depressing events of day-to-day life, to lose our perspective and live as people without hope.
- The book of Zechariah serves as a correction for that tendency in our lives. We have a hope that is sure. How refreshing!





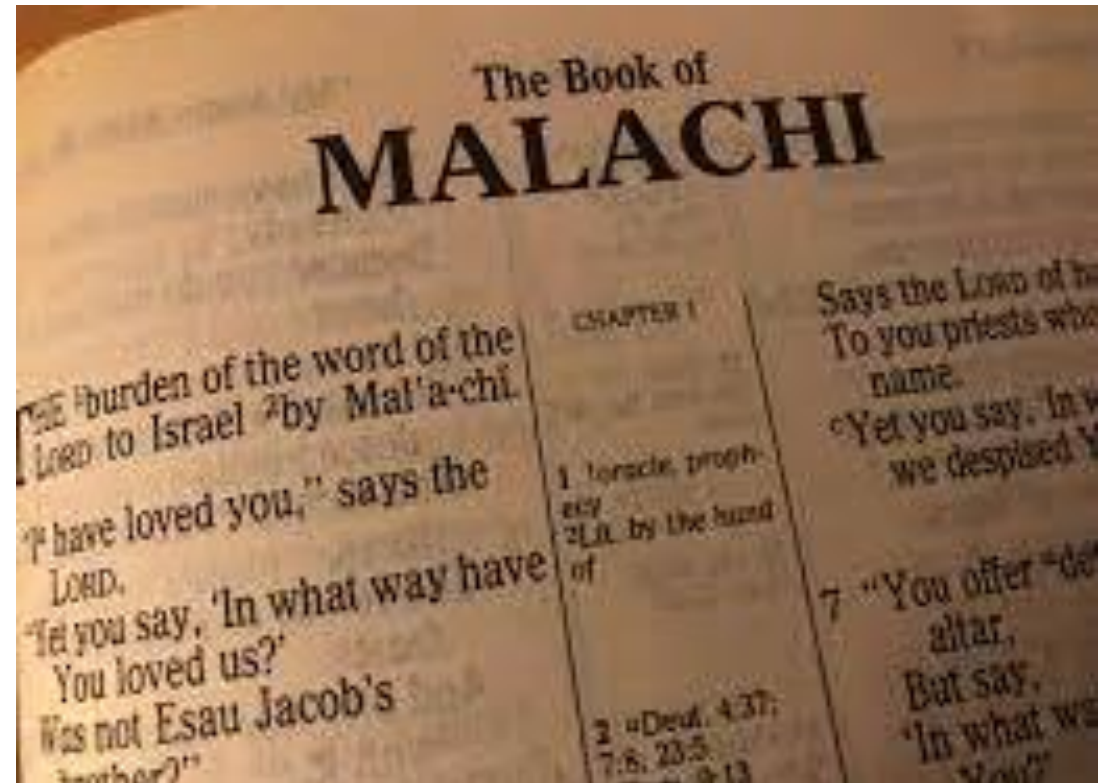
# MALACHI

Last of The Prophets



# Author...

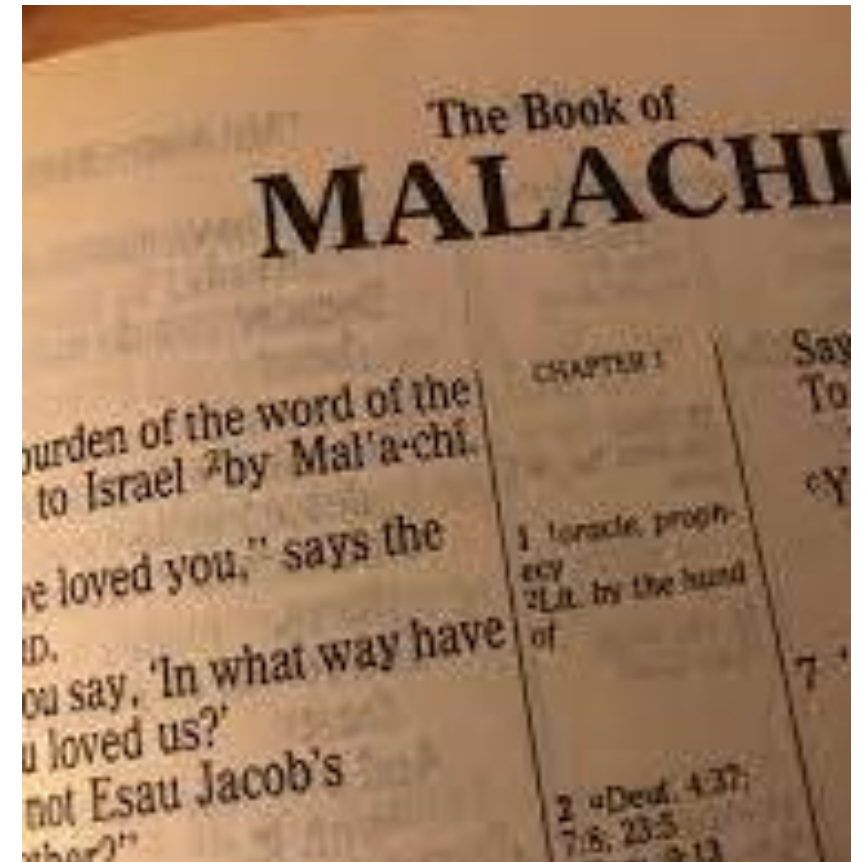
- **Who wrote the book?**
- The pre-final book of the Old Testament, Malachi received its name from its author ([Malachi 1:1](#)).
- In Hebrew, the name comes from a word meaning “messenger,” which points to Malachi’s role as a prophet of the Lord, delivering God’s message to God’s people.<sup>1</sup>
- Malachi offered no other identifying information about himself, leaving out markers typical of other prophets such as his father’s name or the current leader of Israel.
- However, based on the content of the book, it becomes clear that Malachi delivered his message of judgment to a Judean audience familiar with worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem (2:11).
- The people of Judah had turned away from the true worship of the Lord, leaving themselves under judgment and in need of salvation.



# Malachi...

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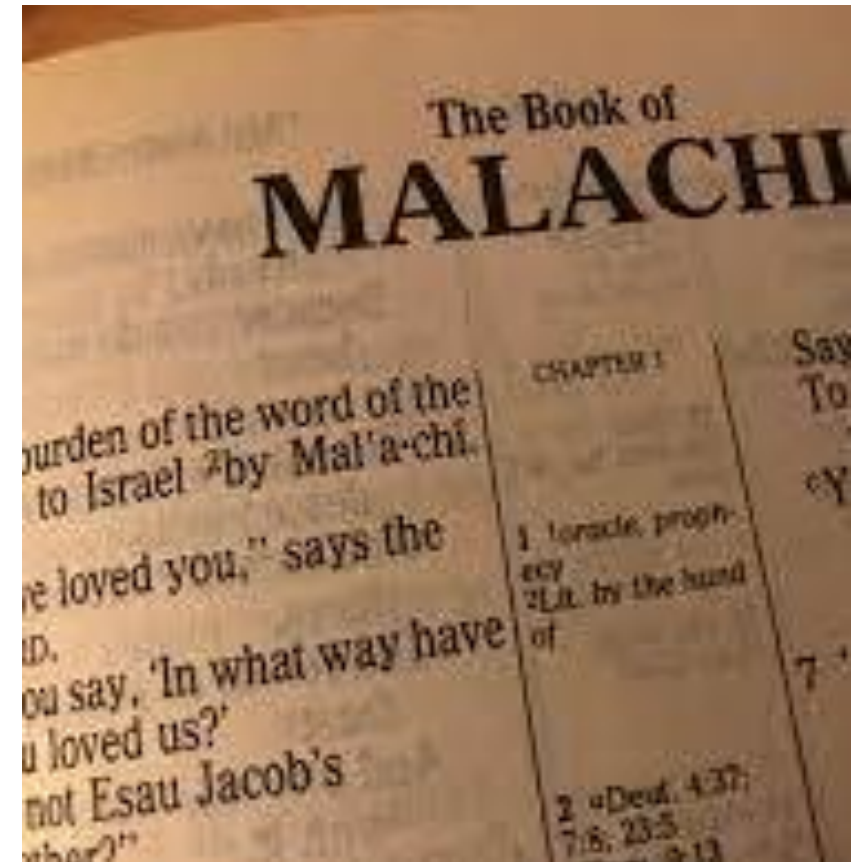
- **Where are we?**
- Malachi certainly wrote to the people of Judah (Malachi 1:1; 2:11), but the historical setting becomes clearer in Malachi 1:8.
- Here the prophet used the Persian word for governor, indicating a time period between 538–333 BC, when the Persian Empire ruled the Promised Land.
- Malachi also wrote about the corruption of the temple sacrifices, meaning that he likely delivered his message many years after the Israelites rebuilt the temple in 515 BC.
- The prophet's concerns mirror those of Nehemiah's, suggesting that Malachi prophesied to the people while Nehemiah left the city for several years, beginning in 432 BC (Nehemiah 13:6).



# Malachi...

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- **Why is Malachi so important?**
- Malachi's unique position as the final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of Israelite men and women,
- members of a nation that had been specially chosen by God, descendents of Abraham, and inheritors of the rich tradition of the Jewish people.
- Their history told of glories like the exodus from Egypt and the faithfulness of God to King David.
- But they had also experienced the judgment of wandering in the desert and the shame of exile from the Promised Land.





# Malachi..

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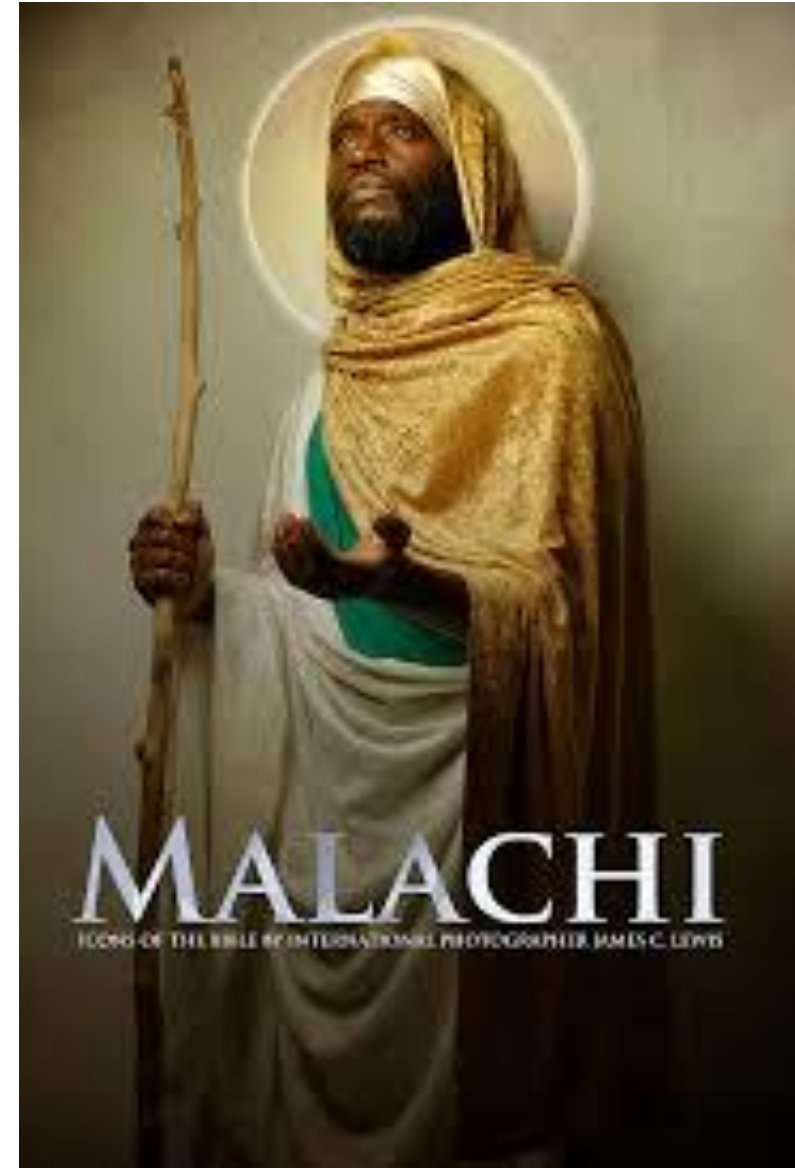
- At the time of Malachi, well over a thousand years after Abraham's era, the Israelites had the advantage and weight of history on their side;
- they could see the shining rewards of faithfulness and the punishments associated with judgment, even to the point of being uprooted from their land.
- But even then, with all that perspective, the book of Malachi teaches us that they still strayed from the Lord's path.
- They needed God's intervention as much as ever, so this book, as a final statement of judgment in the Old Testament, anticipates God's saving work through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

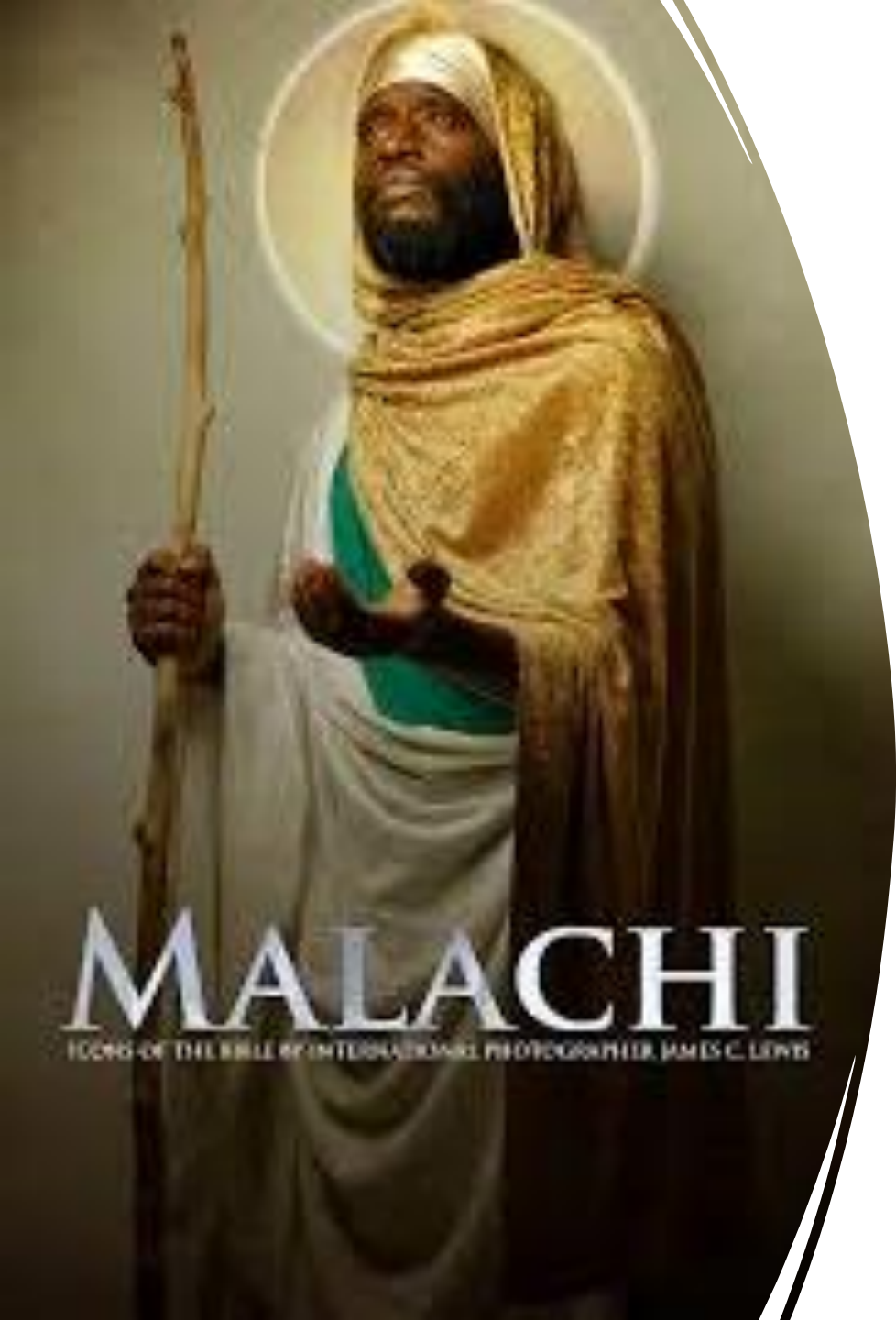


# Malachi...

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- **What's the big idea?**
- The people of Judah began to be exiled from the Promised Land in 605 BC,
- returning from Babylon seventy years later.
- By the time of Malachi, they had been back in the land for more than a hundred years and were looking for the blessings they expected to receive when they returned.
- Though the temple had been rebuilt, the fervour of those early returning Israelites gave way to a thorough apathy for the things of God.
- This led to rampant corruption among the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people.





# Malachi...

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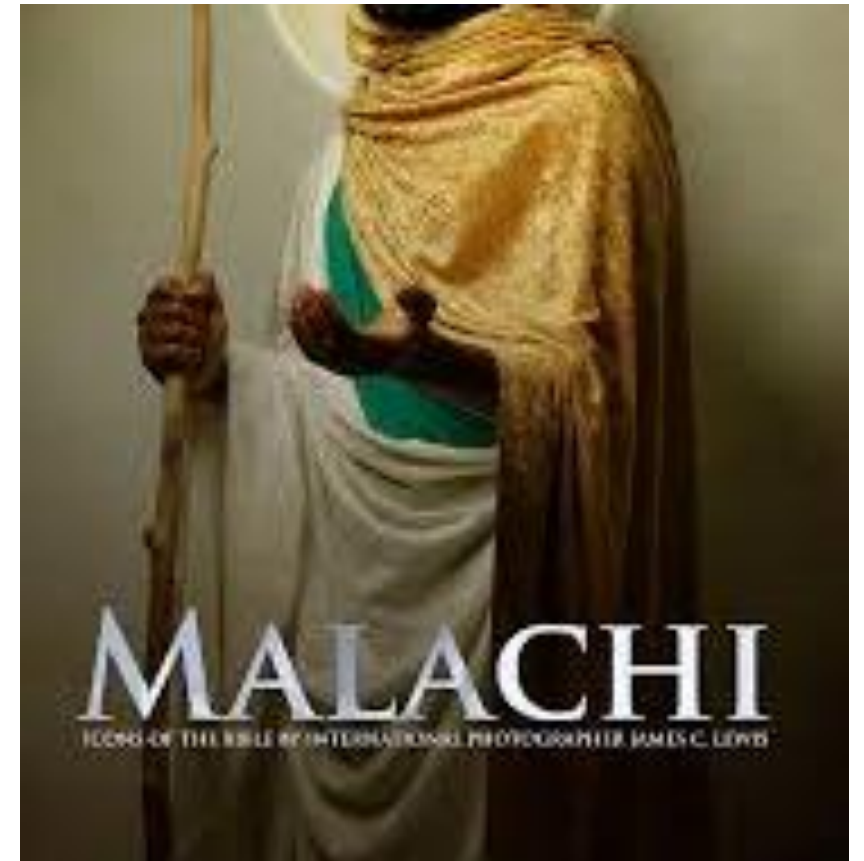
- Malachi came along at a time when the people were struggling to believe that God loved them (Malachi 1:2).
- The people focused on their unfortunate circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds.
- So God pointed the finger back at them, and through Malachi, God told the people where they had fallen short of their covenant with Him.
- If they hoped to see changes, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully according to the promise their fathers had made to God on Mount Sinai all those years before.



# Malachi...

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- **How do I apply this?**
- Throughout Israel's history, the nation failed and God called His people back to Himself.
- Each time, Israel would fail again, prompting the cycle to begin again.
- God's final word of the Old Testament concerns judgment for sin and testifies to our inability to love Him without the help of His grace.
- Do you struggle to follow God consistently?
- Malachi's call prompts us to live faithfully before God and offers hope that God is not yet through with extending mercy to His people (Malachi 3:1; 4:2, 5-6).



A close-up portrait of a woman dressed as Queen Esther. She wears an ornate golden crown with intricate designs and a large, multi-tiered necklace with gold, white pearls, and red gemstones. Her hair is styled in a traditional manner, and she has a serene expression, looking slightly to the right. The background is softly blurred, showing warm, golden light.

# ESTHER

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Queen Of Destiny

# Esther...

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- **Who wrote the book?**
- The unknown author of the book of Esther was most likely a Jew very familiar with the royal Persian court.
- The detailed descriptions of court life and traditions, as well as the events that occurred in the book, point to an eyewitness author.
- Because his perspective was pro-Jewish, scholars believe he was a Jew writing for the remnant that had returned to Judah under Zerubbabel.
- Some have suggested Mordecai himself was the author, though the accolades for him found in the text suggest that another person, perhaps one of his younger contemporaries, was the author.
- The book is named for the “star” of the story, a young Jewish girl named Hadassah who was taken from her guardian, Mordecai, and forced to compete for the affection of the king.
- This unlikely contestant for a beauty pageant was crowned queen of Persia and renamed Esther, meaning “star.”



# Esther...

- **Where are we?**
- The events in the book of Esther occurred from 483 BC to 473 BC,
- during the first half of the reign of King Xerxes, who chose Esther as his queen.
- During this time period, the first remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah were struggling to reestablish temple worship according to the Law of Moses.
- But Esther and Mordecai, along with many other Jews, had chosen not to make the trek back to Judah. They seemed content to stay in Susa, the capital city of Persia, in which the story is set.
- The book was written no earlier than 470 BC and probably no later than 424 BC, during the reign of Xerxes' son Artaxerxes.



# Esther...

- **Why is Esther so important?**
- Esther is the only book in the Bible not to mention the name of God. But that is not to say that God was absent.
- His presence permeates much of the story, as though He were behind the scenes coordinating “coincidences” and circumstances to make His will happen.
- Much like the book of Ruth, this book stands as one of the most skillfully written biblical books.
- Using eight feasts to systematically build and resolve suspense, the author constructed the story chiastically—using a Hebrew literary device in which events mirror each other inversely.
- Early listeners to the story would have recognized significant events and followed the rising tension with understanding.
- Haman, the king’s evil second-in-command, was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, who were ancient enemies of God’s people (Numbers 24:7; 1 Samuel 15:8).
- He cast the lot, called “pur,” in order to determine the day that the Jews would be exterminated (Esther 3:7–9). The feast of Purim, still celebrated by Jews today, commemorates the Jews’ deliverance from Haman’s plot (9:24–32).



# Esther...

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- **What's the big idea?**
- While the primary purpose of the book of Esther was to relate the dramatic origins of the feast of Purim, a greater theme shines through the story.
- The sovereignty and faithfulness of God permeate each scene. Nothing is truly coincidental, the book of Esther says to us. God's sovereignty is best summarized in Mordecai's exhortation to Esther: “
- And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” ([Esther 4:14](#)).
- When events seemed out of control to Esther and Mordecai, when the king dictated ruin for their people, when evil was poised to triumph . . .





# Esther...

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- God was at work. He worked through their dark days (Esther was taken to the harem [2:1–16]),
- their faithful obedience (Esther risked her life before the king [5:1–3]), and their victories (Esther revealed Haman’s plot and the Jews’ destruction of their enemies [7–9]). This message is clear:
- God is sovereign even when life doesn’t make sense.
- God is also the great Promise Keeper. Mordecai said to Esther:
- “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish” (Esther 4:14).
- Mordecai’s words reflected his faith that God would honor His eternal covenant with Abraham and David.



# Application...

- **How do I apply this?**
- Life can be hard. Difficult times happen, and pain cannot be avoided.
- When life doesn't make sense, do you turn to God or away from Him?
- Let the book of Esther encourage you that God is always present. Jesus called us "friends" (John 15:15), and the Spirit is our "Helper" (14:26).
- Trust and obey, as Esther did. And watch God silently weave all events for His glory . . . and for our good.
- **All notes in this power point were culled from Chuck Swindoll's Insight For Living Website**

