

MALACHI

Outlined Bible

Personal Background

The word *Malachi* is generally translated "*my messenger*." "It may reasonably be regarded as an abbreviation of *Malakhiyah* which means 'messenger of Jehovah'" (George L. Robinson). "There has been considerable scholarly debate" over the centuries "as to whether or not 'Malachi' is a genuine proper name or a common noun" (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia*). If it is the latter, this book is by an anonymous writer referred to as "My messenger" or the "Messenger of Jehovah."

The LXX (Septuagint) regards the word as a noun rather than a proper name. The *Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel* (an Aramaic paraphrase of the prophetic books dating from the 4th or 5th century AD, but containing many earlier traditions) has: "My messenger who is Ezra the scribe." Jerome (340-420 AD) and John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) both agreed with this view that the actual name of the author was Ezra. The *Talmud* (Megillah 15a) credits Mordecai with writing this book. Others feel it may originally have been a part of the book of Zechariah, which was cut off and made into another book "to make the Minor Prophets amount to the sacred number 12" (Eissfeldt). Matthew Henry points out that some in his day "conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man."

Note --- "Though Josephus mentioned all the major characters of this period, he failed to include a man named *Malachi* among them the name is absent in all the rest of the Bible ...and even where he is quoted in the NT, his name does not appear --- Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*). "The whole matter is ultimately uncertain, and perhaps unimportant; but it is possible that this otherwise unknown name, *Malachi*, was in fact the prophet's actual name" (*The New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

Jewish tradition says he was a member of the "Great Synagogue," that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, and that he died young. Nothing further is known of this man of God.

Date

It is impossible to date this work precisely, however by an examination of the material within the book itself one can determine the general time of this prophecy. The Persian term for *governor* (*pehah*) is used in Malachi 1:8 (see: Neh. 5:14; Haggai 1:1, 14; 2:21), thus indicating this was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539-333 BC).

One can narrow it down more by examining the internal conditions existing in Palestine at this time. The Temple has been rebuilt and sacrifices are being offered in it. The priests are corrupt. The tithes and offerings are neglected. There is intermarriage with pagans and divorce is rampant. There is a spirit of skepticism. Financial abuses abound. Judah is under a governor, and Edom has been destroyed. It is agreed by most scholars that these are the same problems as those faced by Nehemiah. "It is therefore likely that the prophet and Nehemiah were active at about the same time and it would be well to study Nehemiah as a background for Malachi" (Jack P. Lewis). "A fair estimate as to date would be about 435 BC" (Gleason Archer).

Historical Background

- **In 536 BC** the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews officially ended when Cyrus allowed the people of Israel to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel some 50,000 Jews returned. Encouraged by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people rebuilt the Temple between 520-516 BC.

• **In 458 BC** Ezra returned with a second group of exiles. The Persian King during this time was Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC). It was he who permitted Nehemiah to return in 445 BC to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's first term as Governor was 445-433 BC. He then returned to Persia for a time, after which he served a second term as Governor from 430-425 BC.

It was during this time that "Malachi took the helm of spiritual affairs in Jerusalem" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*). "For a full picture of the conditions in Judea during this period one should read Ezra 7-10 and the complete book of Nehemiah. The conditions of the people as revealed in Nehemiah and the bold and courageous attack of Malachi against the problems which the latter sets forth in his book point clearly to the contemporary dates of the two" (Homer Hailey).

Purpose and Occasion

About 100 years had passed since the people of Israel had returned to their homeland from the Babylonian captivity. The Temple had been rebuilt; the walls were rebuilt; the sacrificial system had been reinstated. Most of their goals, which had been set for them upon their return, had been achieved. They were safe from the nations around them. And they were bored!! Their initial enthusiasm, due to the challenges they faced, had worn off. Their worship had become mechanical, ritualistic, and unspiritual. They went through the motions, but their heart was not involved. Their relationships were falling apart --- both with God and with one another. Yet, they can't seem to fathom why God is dissatisfied with them! It is into this arena of deteriorating relationships, enthusiasm, and spirituality that Malachi is thrust, as the last "messenger of the Lord" before a 400-year period of prophetic silence! "His aim was to restore the Jews to a fresh relationship with God by indicating the precise causes of contemporary spiritual declension and setting out the steps by which the life of the community could be renewed. Like Haggai before him, his dominant concern was for the recognition of spiritual priorities on the part of the restored community" (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia*). "Judah's sins against both God and man were overt and numerous" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Some of the sins which occasioned Malachi's angry indictment were:

Priestly laxity --- Mal. 1:6 - 2:9 (Neh. 13:4-9). He "denounced the priestly hierarchy for its inability to furnish that kind of moral and religious leadership which would have enabled the returned community to avoid much of the current distress. The priests had been indifferent and even contemptuous in discharging their duties" (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia*).

Financial abuses & neglect of tithes --- Mal. 3:5-10 (Neh. 13:10-13).

Worship was in a state of decay --- The refuse of the flocks and herds was being brought to the Temple for sacrifices unto God --- Mal. 1:8.

Intermarriage with pagans & divorce of their wives to marry pagan women --- The people were not honoring their covenants. Their relationships, both with God and with each other, were failing --- Mal. 2:10-16 (Neh. 10:30; 13:23-28; Ezra 9-10).

"The people of Israel have become disillusioned and doubtful. They begin to question God's providence as their faith imperceptibly degenerates into cynicism. Internally, they wonder whether it is worth serving God after all. Externally, these attitudes surface in mechanical observances, empty ritual, cheating on tithes and offerings, and crass indifference to God's moral and ceremonial law. Their priests are corrupt and their practices wicked, but they are so spiritually insensitive that they wonder why they are not being blessed by God. As their perception of God grows dim, the resulting materialism and externalism become settled characteristics that later grip the religious parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (*The Expanded Open Bible*). 74

The Style of the Book

"The book of Malachi is written in a style unique in the prophets" (Jack P. Lewis). It is a new style of address known as the *Didactic -- Dialectic* method of speaking (also known as the *Disputation* method). Later this use of "assertion -- objection -- rebuttal" became quite popular, and was the usual format for the rabbis and scribes. This method of making a point is found throughout the Gospels and Epistles of the NT canon.

"In this type of teaching an *assertion* or charge is made, a fancied *objection* is raised by the hearers, and a *refutation* to the objection is presented by the speaker. In the style of Malachi we have the beginning of a method of teaching that later became universal in the Jewish schools and in the synagogue" (Homer Hailey). Malachi 1:2 is a good example of the format which is typical of this author's style.

Malachi is written much like a running debate with those who call into question the Lord's goodness and justice. "The style of Malachi, then, is that of the spoken word. The book is very much like the letter of James in the NT, and resembles a collection of loosely connected oracles rather than a carefully organized literary work" (*The New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

Several important themes are seen in the book of Malachi. Among these are the following:
The book of remembrance --- Mal. 3:16, in which the deeds of the righteous are recorded. The development of this concept is seen in the later writings of God's people.

The idea that true repentance is the first step toward a proper spiritual relationship with God is stressed. Malachi emphasizes the coming of a forerunner who is to herald the coming of the Lord. Jesus and others regarded this prophecy as foreshadowing the work of John the Baptist --- Mark 9:11-13.

MALACHI

Summarized Bible

Malachi has no introductory information about him. It begins with "The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel" and then proceeds to speak against the evil practices of those who had returned from Babylon. (Mal 1:1)

"It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name? You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, How have we defiled you? By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? ... I will accept no offering from your hands.'" (Mal 1: 6-8, 10)

"Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord."

"This admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name, I will send a curse among you." (Mal 2:1-2)

"My covenant was with him Tribe of Levi, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and

nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.” (Mal 2:5-6)

“But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi ... because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.” (Mal 2:8-9)

“Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.” (Mal 2:11-12)

Comment: The Law of Moses prohibited marrying pagan idol worshippers “When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods.” (Deut. 7:1-4)

Comment: The promise that all nations would be blessed by the promised Messiah, Christ, was given to Abraham and thus to the twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore, marrying within the twelve tribes ensured He would be an Israelite from the lineage of David.

“As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob - even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty. Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” (Mal 2:12-14)

“So, I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.” (Mal 3:5)

“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, How do we rob you? In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe (not part or blemished offerings) into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” (Mal 3:8-10)

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty.” (Mal 4:1)

Key Points from Malachi

- Contempt for God is revealed by keeping the best for self.
- Walking with the Lord in uprightness produces a life of peace.
- Forsaking one’s covenant relationship with God, spouse or anyone else is detestable as it is adultery, the breaking of a covenant.

Arrogant and evildoers will be consumed by fire at the end of time