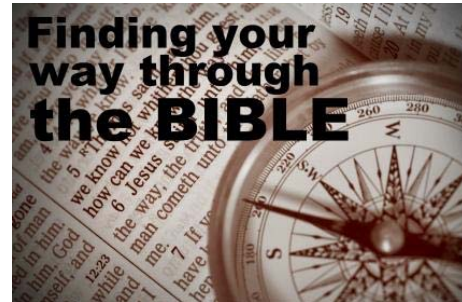


Malachi

Author

Malachi's name means "my messenger." Since the term occurs in [3:1](#), and since both prophets and priests were called messengers of the Lord (see [2:7](#); [Hag 1:13](#)), some have thought "Malachi" to be only a title that tradition has given the author.

The view has been supported by appeal to the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint), which translates the term in [1:1](#) "his messenger" rather than as a proper noun. The matter, however, remains uncertain, and it is still very likely that Malachi was in fact the author's name.



Background

Spurred on by the prophetic activity of Haggai and Zechariah, the returned exiles under the leadership of their governor Zerubbabel finished the temple in 516 b.c. In 458 the community was strengthened by the coming of the priest Ezra and several thousand more Jews. Artaxerxes king of Persia encouraged Ezra to reconstitute the temple worship ([Ezr 7:17](#)) and to make sure the law of Moses was being obeyed ([Ezr 7:25–26](#)).

Fourteen years later (444) the same Persian king permitted his cupbearer Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls ([Ne 6:15](#)). In 433 b.c. Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into sin once more. Later, however, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to discover that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was broken, the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt ([Ne 13:7–31](#)). Several of these same sins are condemned by Malachi (see [1:6–14](#); [2:14–16](#); [3:8–11](#)).

Date

The similarity between the sins denounced in Nehemiah and those denounced in Malachi suggests that the two leaders were contemporaries. Malachi may have been written after Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 b.c. or during his second period as governor. Since the governor mentioned in [1:8](#) (see note there) probably was not Nehemiah, the first alternative may be more likely. Malachi was most likely the last prophet of the OT era (though some place Joel later).

Themes and Theology

The theological message of the book can be summed up in one sentence: The Great King ([1:14](#)) will come not only to judge his people ([3:1–5](#); [4:1](#)) but also to bless and restore them ([3:6–12](#); [4:2](#)).

Although the Jews had been allowed to return from exile and rebuild the temple, several discouraging factors brought about a general religious malaise: (1) Their land remained but a small province in the backwaters of the Persian empire, (2) the glorious future announced by the prophets (including the other postexilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah) had not (yet) been realized, and (3) their God had not (yet) come to his temple ([3:1](#)) with majesty and power (as celebrated in [Ps 68](#)) to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the nations. Doubting God's covenant love

([1:2](#)) and no longer trusting his justice ([2:17](#); [3:14–15](#)), the Jews of the restored community began to lose hope. So their worship degenerated into a listless perpetuation of mere forms, and they no longer took the law seriously.

Malachi rebukes their doubt of God's love ([1:2–5](#)) and the faithlessness of both priests ([1:6–2:9](#)) and people ([2:10–16](#)). To their charge that God is unjust ([2:17](#)) because he has failed to come in judgment to exalt his people, Malachi answers with an announcement and a warning. The Lord they seek will come—but he will come “like a refiner's fire” ([3:1–4](#)). He will come to judge—but he will judge his people first ([3:5](#)).

Because the Lord does not change in his commitments and purpose, Israel has not been completely destroyed for her persistent unfaithfulness ([3:6](#)). But only through repentance and reformation will she again experience God's blessing ([3:6–12](#)). Those who honor the Lord will be spared when he comes to judge ([3:16–18](#)).

In conclusion, Malachi once more reassures and warns his readers that “the day [‘that great and dreadful day of the Lord,’ [4:5](#)] is coming”. In that day the righteous will rejoice, and “you will trample down the wicked” ([4:2–3](#)). So “remember the law of my servant Moses” ([4:4](#)). To prepare his people for that day the Lord will send “the prophet Elijah” to call them back to the godly ways of their forefathers ([4:5–6](#)).

Literary Features

The text features a series of questions asked by both God and the people. Frequently the Lord's statements are followed by sarcastic questions introduced by “(But) you ask” ([1:2,6–7](#); [2:14,17](#); [3:7–8,13](#); cf. [1:13](#)). In each case the Lord's response is given.

Repetition is a key element in the book. The name “Lord Almighty” occurs 20 times (see note on [1Sa 1:3](#)). The book begins with a description of the wasteland of Edom ([1:3–4](#)) and ends with a warning of Israel's destruction ([4:6](#)).

Several vivid figures are employed within the book of Malachi. The priests sniff contemptuously at the altar of the Lord ([1:13](#)). As Judge, “he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap” ([3:2](#)), but “the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” ([4:2](#)).

Outline

- Title ([1:1](#))
- Introduction: God's Faithful Covenant Love for Israel Affirmed ([1:2–5](#))
- Israel's Unfaithfulness Rebuked ([1:6–2:16](#))
 - The Unfaithfulness of the Priests ([1:6–2:9](#))
 1. They dishonor God in their sacrifices ([1:6–14](#))
 2. They do not faithfully teach the law ([2:1–9](#))
 - The Unfaithfulness of the People ([2:10–16](#))
- The Lord's Coming Announced ([2:17–4:6](#))
 - The Lord Will Come to Purify the Priests and Judge the People ([2:17–3:5](#))
 - A Call to Repentance in View of the Lord's Coming ([3:6–18](#))
 1. An exhortation to faithful giving ([3:6–12](#))
 2. An exhortation to faithful service ([3:13–18](#))
 - The Day of the Lord Announced ([ch. 4](#))