

Malachi

Authorship: Malachi (1:1). Biographical details unknown.

Date: About 430 B.C.

Background: With encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the first group of Jews return from captivity had finished rebuilding the Temple in about 515 B.C. As the second and third waves of exiles returned in 457 B.C. and 445 B.C., Ezra and Nehemiah led the nation in spiritual revival. In about 432 B.C., Nehemiah returned to Babylon for a while, and when he returned to Jerusalem found that spiritual conditions had deteriorated (see Nehemiah 13). It is generally thought that Malachi ministered at about this time, reminding the people of God's love for them, calling them to repentance, warning of judgment, and foretelling great blessings for those whose hearts were right.

Recipients: Israelites in Judah after the Babylonian exile. The first audience was the people of Judah of the second or third generation after the return from captivity that had become lethargic in their relationship to God.

Purpose: (1) To rebuke the profaning of that which is holy; (2) To rebuke the abuse of proper human relationships; (3) To announce both the judgment and the blessing of the coming "day of the Lord."

Unique Features: (1) For its length, Malachi includes more questions (some 25) than any other book in the Bible – including perhaps the most famous one "Will a man rob God?" (3:8 KJV); (2) It contains the most famous Old Testament passage on giving (3:8-10).

Key Verse

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need" (Malachi 3:10 ESV).

Meaning of Name

Malachi, the fifth-century prophet of Judah, has given his name to this book as its composer. His name means "My Messenger" in Hebrew.

Key Term: "Messenger"

Malachi, God's messenger, noted that while true priests of God served as his messengers (2:7), God would one day send "my messenger" (3:1, John the Baptist) to prepare the way for "the messenger of the covenant" (3:1, Jesus).

One Sentence Summary

Malachi rebuked God's people for specific violations of the covenant, such as laws concerning sacrifices, divorce, and tithes, but he also prophesied the coming of the Messenger who will set all things right.

Outline:

I. God's Love Stated (1:1-5)

II. God's Love Scorned (1:6-3:18)

- A. The priests' contempt for God (1:6-14)
- B. The priests' contempt for the priesthood (1:6-14)
- C. The people's contempt for marriage (2:10-17)
- D. The coming of John the Baptist and Christ (3:1-5)
- E. Robbing from God (3:6-12)
- F. No Benefit from godliness (3:13-15)
- G. The Benefits of godliness (3:16-18)

III. God's Love Shown (4)

Sources:

Easley, Kendell H. *Holman QuickSource: Guide to Understanding the Bible*, Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2002.
Journeying with God: A Survey of the Old Testament, Purposeful Design Publications.
Wilmington, Harold L. *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1997.