

The Book of Malachi

The Author, Title, and Date of Malachi

1. Title: Malachi

2. Author: Malachi (either “my messenger” or “the LORD’s messenger”)

a. Interpretation leads to the question, is ‘Malachi’ is a book title or the proper name of a person?”

Commentary authors believe Malachi was a person.

b. Malachi is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament.

c. We are given no background material about Malachi in the text.

3. Date: Malachi does not mention any *datable* person or event; however, MacArthur writes, that the book was written “most likely during Nehemiah’s return to Persia 433-424 B.C.” (Ne 5:14; 13:6). So... Nehemiah is away and Malachi appears to have taken on the spiritual leadership of the people. How do we know this?

a. Sacrifices being made at the second temple (1:7-10; 3:8) which was finished in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-15)

b. Years have passed and the priests had become increasingly complacent and corrupt (1:6-2:9)

c. The term, “governor” (1:8) indicates Persia has oversight of Judah (Ne 13:6)

d. Emphasis on the Law is a focus similar to both Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:14, 25, 26; Ne 8:18)

e. Malachi shares the same concerns as Nehemiah:

1) Marriage to foreign wives (2:11-15 and also Ezra chapters 9 & 10; Ne 13:23-27

2) Withholding tithes (3:8-10 and also Ne 13:10-14)

3) Social injustice (3:5 and also Ne 5:1-13)

f. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem (424 B.C.) to deal with the very same sins described by Malachi (Ne 13:6)

4. Literary construct: Hearing the cynical comments of the people, Malachi formed rhetorical questions to emphasis the truths of God and the lack of faith and devotion of the people. Malachi then follows with God’s justification for His statement. An Example:

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” (1:2)

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, “How have we despised Your name?” (1:6)

You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied Him?” (2:17)

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!” But you say, “How have we robbed You?” (3:8)

“Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, “What have we spoken against You?” (3:13)

Each of these questions is then answered by God. This form of confrontational *question-answer* teaching later became popular among rabbis and scribes.

The Background and Setting of Malachi

1. Historical

a. First return under Zerubbabel’s uncle, Sheshbazzar, 538-536 B.C. (with 50,000) (Ezra 1:8-11)

b. Temple rebuilt 516 B.C. (Haggai and Zechariah prophesy to direct and encourage the temple reconstruction)

c. The second return under Ezra (Scribe) 458 B.C.

d. The third return under Nehemiah (Cupbearer of the king) 445 B.C.

e. Nehemiah goes back to Persia, as he said he would:

Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, “How long will your journey be, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. (Ne 2:6)

f. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem (424 B.C.), observed the many sins of the people and confronts them. He restores practices required to honor God.

2. Physical Location: Jerusalem

The Purpose of Malachi

1. Spiritual revitalization.

2. Confrontation of sin. Malachi observed the people sinning. He pointed out their errors in no uncertain terms and delivered some hard truths (warnings, threats, etc.) to turn them back to God.

Key Verses

“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” (3:6)

The prophesy of John the Baptist:

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.” (3:1a)

John 1:19-23 referencing Isaiah 40:3

Why would the people ask John if he was Elijah (John 1:21)? See Malachi 4:5-6

The cleansing of the temple (Partially fulfilled in John 2:13-18) to be completely fulfilled when Christ returns:

“And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.” (3:1b-3)

The Message of Malachi

1. Dutiful, loving children (the people) honor their father (God) not by formal rituals (outward compliance) but how they lived (inward acceptance).

2. Contempt of the Lord results in judgment (purification) and the need to repent. Repentance leads to restoration (Israel’s future).

3. Christ Jesus is the sovereign Lord of Israel and the entire world.

The Structure of Malachi

1. Denunciation of Israel’s Sins (1:1-2:16)

a. Reminder of God’s love for Israel (1:1-5)

b. Rebuke of the priests (1:6-2:9)

1) Contempt for God’s altar (1:6-14)

2) Contempt for God’s glory (2:1-3)

3) Contempt for God’s law (2:4-9)

c. Rebuke of the people (2:10-16)

2. Declaration of Israel’s Judgment and Blessing (2:17-4:6).

a. Coming of a messenger (2:17-3:5)

b. Challenge to repent (3:6-12)

c. Criticism by Israel against the Lord (3:13-15)

d. Consolidation of the faithful remnant (3:16-4:6)

The Themes of Malachi

1. The Lord’s covenant with His people (2:4, 5, 8, 10, 14; 3:1)

2. Rebuke of the priests (1:6-2:9) and the people (2:10-16)

3. The Lord’s future return will be in judgment to refine, purify and purge (3:2, 3)

The last events of the Old Testament are recorded in Era, Nehemiah and Esther. After Malachi’s prophetic writings, God is silent for 400 years. God gives no further revelation of Himself until He ends John the Baptist, His consummate messenger, who cries out in the wilderness heralding the arrival of our LORD and preparing His way.

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