
BOOK OF MALACHI

Approximate date: 460s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-100s B.C.E. (some Left)

Time period: instability following the reconstruction of the Second Temple

Author(s): Malachi (Right, some conservative-moderate); an unnamed messenger (some conservative moderate, Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: Southern Kingdom Israelites and Jerusalemites

People:

Malachi, Judah (people)

People mentioned:

Jacob, Esau, Edom, Levi, Moses, Elijah

Places:

Israel, Jerusalem

Key Themes:

the Lord says that He loves Jacob, but hates Esau, describing His punishment upon Edom / Malachi rebukes the priests who bring substandard offerings before the Lord / the Lord says He will punish the priests if they do not heed His ways / Malachi declares that Judah has broken faith with God via intermarriage with pagans / Malachi says that a day will come when the people are properly refined / God testifies that He has an unchanging character, unlike those who defraud and rob from Him via their offerings / those who fear God and obey Him will be spared from His punishment / when God's punishment is enacted, evil persons will be set "afire" / the Lord asks His people to remember the Torah of Moses / the Lord says that Elijah will come before the day of His fierce judgment

Key Scriptures: Malachi 1:2-5, 7-8, 12-13; 2:7-9, 16; 3:1-4, 6-7; 4:1-2, 4-5 / **The sinful priests** (1:1-2:9); **The sinful people** (2:10-3:15); **The faithful few** (3:16-4:6)

Theological Summary: The name Malachi (Heb. *Malaki*, מַלְאָכִי) means "My messenger." Some have been tempted to believe that the title of this book is generic, as *malaki* is rendered

in the Greek LXX as *angelou autou* (ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ) or “His messenger” (*IDB*).¹ The prophecies of Malachi appear in the period following the reconstruction of the Temple in 516 B.C.E., and the return of Nehemiah to Persia in 433 B.C.E. (cf. Nehemiah 13:6). When Nehemiah returned, the Jews had fallen back into sins such as breaking the Sabbath, intermarrying with foreigners, and the priesthood was corrupt and not performing its duties ably.² These are the same sins condemned by Malachi (1:6-14; 2:14-16; 3:8-11). Many lean toward Malachi and Nehemiah being contemporaries, possibly with Malachi’s prophetic ministry occurring between Nehemiah’s departure to Persia and his return to Jerusalem. Most interpreters point to Malachi being written during the Persian period. Nothing is known in the Biblical record of Malachi, behind this as some kind of name or designation.

No specific date is given in the text of Malachi, yet it is clearly post-exilic,³ with specific supports for this dating inferred from the text.⁴ John Calvin believed that the “messenger” was actually Ezra the Scribe, whereas historically the Church Fathers followed Jewish tradition in ascribing Malachi’s prophecies to a real prophet named Malachi.⁵ The debate over the name of Malachi as “my messenger” led some throughout Jewish and Christian history to support a view that this is not a proper name, and that another individual, anonymous or otherwise, was this messenger.⁶ Most scholars, conservative or liberal, have maintained some kind of unity for the Book of Malachi.⁷ It is notable that Rabbinic tradition attributed that those of the Great Synagogue had the ultimate responsibility for collecting and editing the prophetic books (b.*Bava Batra* 14b).⁸ The Talmud classifies Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all as three separate Prophets (b.*Yoma* 9b; b.*Sukkah* 44a; b.*Rosh Hashanah* 19b; b.*Megillah* 3a).

Some liberals propose that the Book of Malachi is the third in a set of prophecies added on to the prophecies of so-called Deutero-Zechariah.⁹ Yet, it is notable that not all liberals are united around the idea of Malachi being something other than a personal name. Jewish liberals, in particular, do commonly assert that Malachi was a personal name, even though there are attestations in Rabbinic literature of Malachi being Ezra (b.*Megillah* 15a).¹⁰

¹ W. Neil, “Malachi,” in *IDB*, 3:229.

² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 959-960.

³ James T.H. Adamson, “Malachi,” in *NBCR*, 804; John B. Graybill, “Malachi,” in *NIDB*, 616; Andrew E. Hill, “Malachi, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:479.

⁴ G.V. Smith, “Malachi,” in *ISBE*, 3:226.

⁵ Hill, “Malachi, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:478.

⁶ Smith, “Malachi,” in *ISBE*, 3:226; Robert L. Alden, “Malachi,” in *EXP*, 7:702.

⁷ Smith, “Malachi,” in *ISBE*, 3:226.

⁸ “And said R. Yohanan, ‘He was the first of the group of four prophets who prophesied at that time: Hosea, Isaiah, Amos, and Micah.’ *So should not Hosea come first? Well, since his prophesies are written down along with those of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and since Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are designated as the conclusion of prophecy, he is reckoned along with them. So why not write out his prophecy on its own and put it first? Well, his scroll is so small that if copied on its own it might get lost*” (b.*Bava Batra* 14b; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

Cf. Hill, “Malachi, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:485.

⁹ Hill, “Malachi, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:478.

¹⁰ “*It is learned: Said R. Joshua ben Qorhah: Malachi is Ezra. And the sages say: Malachi is his [proper] name. Said Rav Nahman [DS: + bar Yitzhaq]: It makes sense according to the one who said ‘Malachi is Ezra,’ as is written regarding the prophecy of Malachi, ‘Judah has rebelled, and abominations have been done in Israel and in*

The Hebrew MT of Malachi is in relatively good condition, although the Greek LXX does add some interpretive extrapolations. The Latin Vulgate actually follows the Hebrew more closely. Some expressions seen in Malachi are difficult to translate.¹¹

Major themes expounded upon in Malachi are how God as the Great King (1:14) will judge His people (3:1-5; 4:1), but also restore them (3:6-12; 4:2). The message of Malachi emphasizing the certainty of God's judgment can be seen in how the Prophets' expectation of Israel being restored had not been fulfilled. Uncontent with waiting on the Lord, His people fell back into their same old sinful patterns.¹² Malachi rebukes the people for doubting God's love (1:2-5) and the poor actions of the priests (1:6-2:9). God will judge His own people first (3:5), and the only reason why God has not destroyed Israel is because of His covenant faithfulness (3:6). The people cannot be restored and experience His blessing unless they repent (3:6-12). A great deal of Malachi is presented in a question-and-answer style of format,¹³ with both the people and God asking questions of one another. The Book of Malachi calls the people of God to properly reform themselves.¹⁴

Malachi is the last of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) in the Jewish and Christian book order of the Tanach, and it is also the last book in the Christian book order of the Old Testament. It is notable that the verses marked 4:1-6 in Christian Bibles simply continue as 3:19-24 in Jewish Bibles. Malachi 1:1-2:7 is read as the Haftarah selection for *Toldot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9).

The Apostolic Scriptures appropriate some important themes from the Book of Malachi,¹⁵ notably including a reference to the coming of John the Baptist (3:1; cf. Matthew 11:10).

There is presently no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Malachi. While verses from Malachi (4:4) may often be quoted as "sound bytes" to encourage people to follow the Torah, the overall message of God's messenger is largely not understood or is underappreciated. Many of today's Messianics believe we are in an hour of restoration, yet when it does not come on the timetable that many are expecting, will we fall into the same pattern as the Jews depicted in the text? Let us hope not, and heed Malachi's message of repentance, patiently waiting for God to perform His complete redemption of the Earth. In a similar manner, let us remember that much of today's Church seems to have reached a plateau, thinking that since so much has been accomplished for God, no new heights can be reached. Too many modern Christians have fallen into the same trap of Malachi's original audience.

Bibliography

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Jerusalem, for Judah has desecrated the beloved sanctuary of God, and has taken the daughter of a foreign god' (Mal. 2:11)" (b.*Megillah* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

¹¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 961-962; Hill, "Malachi, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:480.

¹² Adamson, in *NBCR*, 804; Smith, "Malachi," in *ISBE*, 3:228.

¹³ Julia M. O'Brien, "Malachi," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1351.

¹⁴ Ehud ben Zvi, "Malachi," in *Jewish Study Bible*, pp 1268-1269.

¹⁵ Dillard and Longman, 442.

- Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. "Malachi," in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 437-442.
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- Smith, G.V. "Malachi," in *ISBE*, 3:226-228.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON MALACHI:

- 1. How serious was it for God's priests to give Him insufficient and second-rate offerings?**
- 2. According to Malachi, what will happen on the Day of the LORD? How is certain symbolism or prophecy viewed in the Gospels as foreshadowing the ministry of Yeshua the Messiah (3:1; cf. Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27)?**
- 3. Why do you think God calls the people to remember the Torah (4:4)? To what extent is this (4:6) happening via the growth of today's Messianic movement?**
- 4. Do you believe today's Messianic community takes the message and themes of Malachi seriously? Why or why not?**

REFLECTION ON MALACHI'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Malachi: