

MALACHI

Introduction

Author. The book is ascribed to Malachi whose name means "My Messenger." Debate concerning the author normally involves the question of whether Malachi is a name or title. The Septuagint translates the word impersonally as "My Messenger." The matter is uncertain however, and based on the analogy of the other prophets it would seem that Malachi was in fact the author's name.

Date. It is agreed that Malachi is at least post-exilic. An exact dating is more difficult because no king nor any identifiable event or incident, is mentioned. The two primary suggestions are: 1) after Haggai-Zechariah (520 B.C.) but before the coming of Ezra in 458 B. C. and 2) during the return visit of Nehemiah to Persia and his consequent absence from Jerusalem, about 433 B. C. The latter is preferred for the following reasons: 1) The close agreement between Nehemiah and Malachi in many particulars, 2) Malachi calls the people to return to Moses, which seems to presuppose Ezra's efforts to restore the Law (Mal. 4:4; Nehemiah 8-10), 3) Malachi condemns the people for robbing tithes (3:7ff). In Ezra's day, the priests were cared for by the government while in Nehemiah's day the temple was supported by free-will offerings of the people. 4) The title in 1:8 (governor) may be explained by the fact that Nehemiah had returned temporarily to Babylon.

Structure. The book of Malachi takes the form of a legal dialogue between God and Israel. It is a courtroom scene. Six basic disputations between God and the nation comprise the bulk of the book. The form of these six sections is easily identified by: 1) a basic statement "'I have loved you,' says the Lord," 2) a question, "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" and 3) a rebuttal "was not Esau Jacob's brother" These six basic sections are followed by two appendices admonishing the people to obedience and expectancy.

Occasion. The first return from captivity occurred in 537 B. C. and the temple was completed in 516 B. C. Temple worship was reinstituted under the control of the levites and the people expected the

advent of Messiah. This expectation was complicated by the Messianic hopes inspired by the prophets, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others who spoke proleptically and without chronological precision. Life was difficult, Zerubbabel disappointed the messianic hopes of many, and covenantal discipline brought drought and famine. Thus, the people began to accuse God of injustice and of disloyalty to His *covenant* and *prophetic* promises. They began to grow careless in their service to God and concluded that there was no profit in obedience to Him. In 435 B. C., Nehemiah was called back to Babylon temporarily, and restraints were further removed from the people. It was for such a time that Malachi was raised up to minister to Israel.

Message Statement. *Obedience to the covenant of Moses will result in present prosperity and preparedness for the coming of Messiah.*

Argument

- 1A INGRATITUDE OF THE PEOPLE 1:1-5
Israel's disobedience may have originated from their questioning of God's love for them. After the exile, return, and recent difficult times in the land, especially in light of their expectations, they considered God's love for them to be nothing unique. Malachi assures them that God has loved them, a fact which is obvious when compared with Edom. The difference between Israel and Edom is not that Israel would avoid chastisement and Edom would not, but rather that Edom would not recover from God's wrath. Obviously Israel already had, and would even receive more, and ultimate blessing in the future.
- 2A APATHY IN WORSHIP 1:6-2:9
Central to the covenant relationship was the nation's worship at the central sanctuary. As such, the people's apathy in worship is the second item addressed by the prophet. Since the priests are responsible for worship this address is directed primarily toward them.
- 1B The Actions of the Priests 1:6-11
The priests evidently allowed unacceptable sacrifices brought by the people to be offered. God's response is that no worship is preferable to half-hearted worship (1:10).
- 2B The Attitudes of the Priests 1:12-14
The priests' attitude is next addressed. God's response is a cursing rather than blessing.
- 3B God's Solution to Apathy 2:1-4
As God compares the character expected of a priest and that of the current priests they are found wanting. God's solution is to disgrace them by the very means they were disgracing him, the sacrifices.
- 4B The Summary 2:8-9
The priests' unfaithful teaching was a violation of the covenant which God made with Levi (Numbers 17, 18). Because the priests "despised" Him (1:7, 12), He was making them "despised" (2:9) before the people.

- 3A UNFAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE 2:10-16
The people's unfaithfulness in marriage involved two aspects: marriages with foreign women, (2:10-12); and divorce of Jewish wives, (2:13-16). God's simple summary of the issue, "I hate divorce," occurs here (2:16).
- 4A CONTEMPT FOR GOD'S JUSTICE 2:17-3:5
Israel here challenges God's administration of the moral universe. God's response is the sending of "the Lord" namely Messiah who will act as Judge who will purify. The Messiah will be preceded by a forerunner and his purification will begin at the house of God with the priesthood. He will then extend his judgment to all those who do not fear Him.
- 5A MISHANDLING OF FINANCES 3:7-12
Another symptom of the people's apathy was withholding of required tithes. The promise for obedience was Deuteronomic: blessings from the windows of heaven, agricultural plenty and exaltation among the nations of the earth.
- 6A REBELLION IN WORDS 3:13-4:3
The people had spoken against God by stating that it was vain to serve Him. God's response is twofold: first, God does distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and second, the Day of the Lord and Messiah will come. The wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will enjoy the reign of Messiah.
- 7A GOD'S FINAL COUNSEL AND WARNING 4:4-6
This final counsel of the book is also providentially God's final counsel to the nation before the coming of the Lord. It also is simple and twofold. It consists of an admonition to obey Moses and a reminder to look for Elijah before the coming of the Day of Lord. For these people who were disenchanted with the times, no better advice could be found than to remain *obedient* and *expectant*.

Outline

1A	INGRATITUDE OF THE PEOPLE	1:1-5
1B	<u>Introduction</u>	1:1
2B	<u>The Fact of God's Love</u>	1:2
3B	<u>The Comparison of God's Love</u>	1:3-5
1C	The past	1:3
2C	The future	1:4
3C	The result	1:5
2A	APATHY IN WORSHIP	1:6-2:9
1B	<u>The Actions of the Priests</u>	1:6-11
1C	Their sin	1:6-7
2C	God's response	1:8-11
1D	The illustration	1:8
2D	The question	1:9
3D	The statement	1:10
4D	The reason	1:11
2B	<u>The Attitudes of the Priests</u>	1:12-14
1C	Their sin	1:12-13
2C	God's response	1:14
3B	<u>God's Solution to Apathy</u>	2:1-4
1C	The address	2:1
2C	The punishment	2:2-3
3C	The purpose	2:4-7
1D	The statement	2:4
2D	The description	2:5-7
1E	historically	2:5-6
2E	ideally	2:7
4B	<u>The Summary</u>	2:8-9
3A	UNFAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE	2:10-16
1B	<u>Marriages with Foreign Women</u>	2:10-12
1C	The essence of the sin	2:10

2C	The result of the sin	2:11
3C	The punishment for the sin	2:12
2B	<u>Divorces of Jewish Wives</u>	2:13-16
1C	The essence of the charge	2:13-14
2C	The purpose of the charge	2:15
3C	The basis of the charge	2:16
4A	CONTEMPT FOR GOD'S JUSTICE	2:17-3:5
1B	<u>The Situation of the People</u>	2:17
2B	<u>The Solution of God</u>	3:1-6
1C	The persons involved	3:1
2C	The purposes involved	3:2-5
1D	Purification of the Nation	3:2-4
1E	of Levites	3:2-3
2E	of cultus	3:4
2D	Judgment of sinners	3:5
3C	The principle involved	3:6
5A	MISHANDLING OF FINANCES	3:7-12
1B	<u>The Present Situation</u>	3:7-9
1C	The sin	3:7-8
2C	The result	3:9
2B	<u>The Prospective Situation</u>	3:10-12
1C	Correct action	3:10
2C	National prosperity	3:11
3C	International recognition	3:12
6A	REBELLION IN WORDS	3:13-4:3
1B	<u>The People's Words</u>	3:13-15
1C	The problem	3:13
2C	The theology	3:14
3C	The application	3:15

2B	<u>God's Answer</u>	3:16-4:3
1C	Preservation of the righteous	3:16-18
2C	Triumph of righteous over the wicked	4:1-3
1D	The defeat of the wicked	4:1
2D	The victory of the righteous	4:2-3
7A	GOD'S FINAL COUNSEL AND WARNING	4:4-6
1B	<u>An Admonition: Obey Moses</u>	4:4
2B	<u>A Reminder: Anticipate Elijah Before the Day of the Lord</u>	4:5-6
1C	The prophet's identity	4:5
2C	The prophet's purpose	4:6