

Overview of Malachi

Author & Date: The name Malachi means, “my messenger” and some have claimed that this is a pen name and not the prophet’s actual name. This is due to the fact that the name Malachi, whether applied to the prophet or to someone else, appears nowhere else in Scripture. However, the name fits standard Hebrew conventions and there is strong tradition supporting Malachi as the author so there is no reason to doubt this is the prophet’s name. Malachi tells us nothing about himself nor does he give any historical context for his prophecy. However, based upon internal evidence and tradition, Malachi was the last prophetic voice until John the Baptist some 400 years later. Malachi was likely a contemporary with Nehemiah and probably wrote around 438 BC, the time between Nehemiah’s completion of the wall and his return as governor (Neh. 13:6).

Purpose: Malachi wrote at a time when life was good, or at least getting better. Israel had returned from exile, completed the temple and Jerusalem was walled. They were still subjects of the Persians, who had allowed the Israelites to return and rebuild so things seemed normal and stable. As a result, “the inevitable lethargy, laxity and leniency in spiritual matters had developed.”¹ The prevalent view was that God is far off and accepts everyone (sound familiar?). In response to the people's view of a distant God, God becomes personally involved in the book. In 47 of the book’s 55 verses, God speaks in the first person to His people.² Likewise, the phrase, "LORD of hosts" occurs 24 times in this short book. As is true to his name, Malachi delivers God’s message to His people calling them to repent and warning of His personal coming in judgment. Malachi delivers his message using a number of rhetorical questions (about 13) and answers that became common among Rabbis after Malachi (e.g. 1:2). The call to repentance and reminder of coming judgment to an apathetic people calls us to examine the reality of our relationship with Christ.

Outline of Malachi

- I. I Have Loved You (1:1-5)
- II. Where is My Honor? (1:6-2:9)
 - A. Impure Offerings (1:6-14)
 - B. Instructions to Corrupt Priests (2:1-9)
- III. Marriage Covenant (2:10-16)
 - A. Marriage Partners (2:10-16)
 - B. Marital Faithfulness (2:13-16)
- IV. The Lord’s Messenger (2:17-3:17)
- V. Will a Man Rob God? (3:8-12)
- VI. Responses of the People (3:13-18)
- VII. The Great Day of the Lord (4:1-6)

Key/Interesting Passages:

1:2a “I have loved you,” says the Lord.

1:11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts.

¹Robert L. Alden, “Malachi,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed F. E. Gaebeline, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 702.

² Timothy Binder, Outline of Malachi, www.TruthSaves.org.

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- 1:14b For I am a great King,” says the LORD of hosts, “And my name *is to be* feared among the nations.”
- 2:16a For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts.
- 2:17** You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, “In what way have we wearied *Him*?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?” (This passage in the middle of the book serves as a good summary)
- 3:1a Behold I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.
- 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, “ says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it*.”
- 4:5 Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Food for Thought

1. What does the start of the book in 1:2 tell you about God and what expectations does it give you for the rest of the book?
2. The statement in 1:2-3 “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated” is quoted in Romans 9:13 and has been a passage of great debate. In the context of Malachi, why does God bring this example up and how does that frame our understanding of the passage? (Consider 1:2-5)
3. In your own words, list the accusations God is making against the priests from 1:6-14. What parallel actions and attitudes should we watch out for in our service to the Lord?
4. According to 2:1-9, what commendable actions and attitudes should a good priest have (consider also the opposite of any negative example given)? What challenge does that give the New Testament believer as one being built up into a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:5)?
5. What are the two main problems God identifies with marriages in Israel as described in 2:10-17?
6. What insight does verse 11 give you in describing the importance of marriage and the choice of a partner?

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7. In v. 16 God says that he “hates” divorce. Consider verses 14-15, why would God equate divorce with covering with violence? What guidance do these verses give for believing couples facing marital difficulties?
8. The last verse of chapter 2 summarizes the Lord’s position concerning Israel at this time and the question at the end, “Where is the God of justice?” provides a transition to the next chapter (see 3:5). Restate the Lord’s observations from this verse in your own words. What does this verse say about man’s understanding of God?
9. Malachi 3:1 is quoted in Matt 11:10, in Mark 1:2, and partially in Luke 7:27. Who is “My messenger”? And who is “the Lord” in this passage. (Take note of the capitalization of “Lord” which translates the Hebrew “*adonai*” versus LORD which translates “*yahweh*” both of which are used in this passage).
10. What truth does verse 6 confirm about the nature of God and what implications does this make for us in terms of “contemporary enlightenment” concerning who God is and how we interpret and apply His word?
11. In typical fashion for Malachi, he makes a shocking statement in 3:8-12, asks a rhetorical question and provides a response. What attitude should we have toward giving tithes and offerings? What promises does God give to the one who is faithful in tithes and offerings? How might you answer someone who uses these passages to support a “prosperity gospel”?
12. In 3:13-18 Malachi shows the response of both those who feared the Lord and those who did not. What judgments and what blessings does God promise to both groups in 4:1-3?
13. Malachi 4:5-6 is the passage that lead the Scribes of Jesus day to say that “Elijah must come first” (Mark 9:11). How does the New Testament (Mat 17:3-13 and Mark 9:11-13) help us interpret Malachi in this area and what insight does the prophet give us to that ministry at the time of Christ?