

NAME

The term “Malachi” means, “my messenger” or “my angel.”

AUTHOR

The term “Malachi” occurs in 3:1. Since both prophets and priests were called messengers of the Lord (2:7; Haggai 1:13), some have thought “Malachi” to be only a title that tradition has given the author. In this view some think that Malachi was a heavenly missionary or anonymous term. This view has been supported by appeal to the early Greek translation (LXX), which translates the term in 1:1 “His messenger” rather than as a proper noun. The matter, however, remains uncertain, and it is still very likely that Malachi was in fact the author’s name.

Mitchell:

All of the other prophets were individual persons. We know nothing of Obadiah either, but we nonetheless recognize him as a genuine author. If Malachi were not a real person (i.e. an angel) it would be the only exception in all of prophetic literature.

The only fact known about Malachi is his name. From his keen insights into the priesthood some have speculated that he was a priest. Tradition says that he was a member of the great Synagogue. He probably prophesied after the days of Nehemiah - at least long enough after for corruption to have again set in.

DATE

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are referred to as “post-exilic” prophets - the period of history after the Jews returned from their captivity. The history of this period is given in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Malachi was written after the return of the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. Malachi’s book cannot be earlier than 516 B.C. because that was when the second temple was finished during the time of Zechariah and Ezra (Ezra 6:15) and the Passover celebrated (515 B.C. / Ezra 6:19-22). Scholars have placed him anytime from then on through the administration of Nehemiah in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 5:14 / Nehemiah was governor for 12 years). Ezra led a group from Babylon to Jerusalem in 458-457 B.C (Ezra 7:1,7,9; 8). Nehemiah came and began work on the walls of Jerusalem in 445-444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:1). Probably, Malachi wrote shortly after Nehemiah finished his task of completing the restored walls of Jerusalem (432? / Nehemiah 13:10,23; Malachi 2:11; 3:8). Malachi may have been written after Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 B.C. or during his second period as governor.

Probably 450 to 400 B.C.

THEME

Halley (Page 44): *“Final Message to a Disobedient People”*

Mitchell: *“Real love is undying, but will manifest itself in both rebuke and blessing.”*

Mitchell:

The over-riding concept in the book is God’s unfailing love for Israel. This is the master note sounded throughout. Whether we listen to the thunders of judgment or plaintive appeals, we hear

the great love song of Jehovah. The book reveals the consistency, consciousness, and courage of love.

Historical Setting:

Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, is separated from the book of Matthew by a silent period of more than 400 years. And yet, these two books tie together bridging the gap when no voice spoke for God. For more than 400 years there would be no prophet sent by God - no Scriptures being written - no encouragement from God - the heavens were silent. Malachi leaves the reader hanging, waiting with great anticipation for the messenger who is to come and God's coming salvation. Matthew opens with the coming of Jesus the Messiah and John the Baptist who is His messenger (Elijah who has come). Note that the first gospel of the New Testament as to date of writing is probably Mark.

Purpose:

Apathy towards the temple ritual and especially towards the laws of Moses had reached epidemic proportions. Apparently the people had obtained their goal of semi-independence and their hope of religious liberty had been realized. Their enemies had been driven off. What this left room for was a descent into compromise, complacency, and a lack of commitment to God. No prophet or preacher who loves his people really enjoys pointing out their sin or warning them of coming judgment. Yet, this is what Malachi was called to do. Though Malachi's message is largely negative, here and there it offers a glimmer of hope (3:10-12, 16,17; 4:2). Indeed, even the messages of warning are intended to return the post-exilic people to the God who will bless those who with purified hearts will live in obedience honoring Him.

Peculiarities:

Malachi uses the Socratic method of teaching (question and answer). There are at least eight questions which the people ask of God. These questions are sarcastic in nature and imply that those asking the question see no fault of their own. The issues they have are with God. In their eyes God has failed them. God in turn answers each of these questions giving practical and honest answers. God's answers, if taken seriously, demand change within the heart of the reader.

Key Word (Nelson's): The Appeal to Backsliders - The divine dialogue in Malachi's prophecy is designed as an appeal to break through the barrier of Israel's disbelief, disappointment, and discouragement. God reveals His continuing love in spite of Israel's lethargy. His appeal in this oracle is for the people and priests to stop and realize that their lack of blessing is not caused by God's lack of concern, but by their disobedience of the covenant law.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' By saying, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them.' Or, by asking, 'Where is the God of justice?' Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:17-3:1).

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction" (Malachi 4:5,6).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 3 - The last book of the Old Testament concludes with a dramatic prophecy

of the coming of the Messiah and John the Baptist: *"I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me"* (Malachi 3:1).

Outline:

- I. God's Love Acclaimed 1:1-5
Declaration of God's love for Israel: *"I have loved you.."* (1:2) - what a great way to open a book and the final prophecy of the Old Testament... what great words to hang on to until Messiah comes
Sarcastic Question #1: *"How have you loved us?"* or *"Where is God's love? We don't see any evidence of love on Your part."* (1:2b) - the people are indifferent and callous to God and so assumed that all that they had was a result of their own effort and cleverness. In reality they were flouting God's love.
- II. God's Condemnation Affirmed 1:6-2:17
 - A. Condemnation of Priests 1:6-2:9
Sarcastic Question #2: *"How have we despised Your name?"* (1:6) - the indictment is against priests who say that God's table should be defiled. In reality, focused on themselves, they were oblivious to their despising of God and His worthiness of respect
Sarcastic Question #3: *"My, how tiresome it is."* or *"How mundane is God?"* (1:13) - the ritual of the temple had become commonplace. The people were simply going through the motions. Focused on themselves, they had lost the personal significance of worship.
 - B. Condemnation of the People 2:10-17
God focuses on the results of defiling God's covenant with His people
Sarcastic Question #4: *"For what reason?"* or *"Why are You not pleased with our offerings?"* (2:14) By their actions the Jews were profaning the holiness of God. Marriage and divorce presents an illustration of God's relationship with His people (Ezekiel 16:8) as our Redeemer and protector. In this sense, in contrast to verse 12 and given the words of Jesus (Matthew 19:6: Mark 10:9), one wonders if it is impossible for man himself to break the union of God and man - especially if it is God Himself who ordains the covenant. Perhaps some of the reasons why God hates divorce relate to the pain it causes and His desire to create a permanent covenant with His people.
Sarcastic Question #5: *"How have we wearied the Lord?"* (2:17a) points to the abuses in connection with worship and divorce. Question #5 has been answered in the previous section.
Sarcastic Question #6: *"Where is the God of justice?"* (2:17b) concerns God's response to this sin. The people of Malachi's day, surrounded by pagan enemies, didn't see God doing anything. Their question was, *"Why doesn't God wipe them out?"* The profound tragedy in the question is that the Hebrews knew what was right and what was wrong and they suppressed the truth in order to justify their own descent into sin. Their justification for continuing in sin was that God had not judged the people around them.
- III. God's Comfort Assured 3,4
 - A. Comfort Through the Coming Deliverer 3:1-16
Sarcastic Question #7: *"How shall return?"* (3:7) indicates that the people had no idea that they had ever left. Proverbs 16:2 declares: *"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weights the motives."* God sees it all. God will deal with the sins of His people.
Sarcastic Question #8: *"What have we spoken against You?"* (3:13) indicates the arrogant pride of the Hebrews. They were "puffed up" by their own understanding and expectations of God. From their arrogance they were making confident statements about God that were completely wrong and they didn't even realize it.

B. Comfort Through the Coming Day 3:17-4:6 Mingled judgment and blessing

RECIPIENT(S)

The opening verse (1:1) tells us that this is “*the oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel.*” Ultimately, then, the origin of the book is in the mind of God and those addressed are the people of God. It is most probable that Malachi and the people he was addressing were in Jerusalem as those who had returned from exile (2:11). Among those mentioned in the book, the Levitical priests receive special focus (1:6,10; 2:1,4,7; 3:3). The book contains several references to nations outside of Israel. Although these nations were not in Malachi’s immediate audience they too must be considered as possible recipients of his message (1:5,11,14; 3:12). It is possible that these references are included as pertaining particular significance for the Jews of the Diaspora.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

1. Malachi (the Old Testament) ends with a focus on the Messiah and His forerunner (i.e. hope and expectation). Ultimately, Malachi is a “set-up” for what comes next (albeit 400 years later).
2. If you ever wonder if God loves you despite your sin, read Malachi.
3. Love takes work - deliberate conscious effort. God is at work loving you. Why not work at loving Him?
4. God is the God of love and justice. God condemns sinners and yet rewards the righteous. Ultimately, God is just in His dealings with mankind. Note the emphasis on “The Day of the Lord” with its two-fold message of judgment and deliverance.
5. Expansion of the theme that God is concerned with all mankind and not just Israel. God is sovereign not only over Israel but over the whole world.
6. The immutability of God is affirmed (“*For I the Lord do not change*” - Malachi 3:6). What God has purposed, meaning the determination to maintain a people for Himself, will happen even if at a later time. (God never changes. (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 3:11; 102:26,27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; James 1:17) If God were to change it would mean that His existence is not perfect, independent, and eternal. While all change is for better or worse, God cannot change since He cannot become any more perfect (or worse). God does not need to improve. God cannot become wiser, more holy, more just, more merciful, more truthful, or less so. Nor do His purposes change. There is no variation with God. His character, power, plans, purposes, promises, love, mercy, justice, and so on all remain without variation. God deals with us (we who are constantly changing) without changing. God changes how He deals with us while He remains unchanged. While His means of dealing with us change He is consistent in purpose. He calls us to repentance and works within us to change bad to good. He is always consistent in doing right in how He deals with us.)

“Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Halley (page 451):

The Closing Words of the Old Testament

- The final exhortation: Remember the Law of Moses, which I gave him! (4:4)
- The final prediction: Elijah will usher in “*the Day of the Lord*” (4:5). He did. 400 years later, in the person of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12; 11:14). This passage may also be predictive of Christ’s second coming in the day of final judgment. Might this also foretell Elijah as one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11?
- The final promise: Love between parents and children (4:6; quoted in Luke 1:17), a symbolic

reference to the promise of God's love for His people.

- The final word: "Curse" (in both the Hebrew and English text), meaning that the plight of mankind would be hopeless should the Lord fail to come.
- Thus closes the Old Testament. Four hundred years later, the New Testament begins with the words, "*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ [the Messiah].*" (Matthew 1:1)

ACTUALLY: Mark 1:1 "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [Messiah], the Son of God.*"

RESOURCES

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As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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