

Introduction to Malachi

Malachi means “My Messenger” (cf., 2:7; 3:1)

Date: Probably 450-400 BC —Approximately 100 years after the end of the exile and the return of the remnant. It was possibly in the time of Ezra, or (more likely) Nehemiah—or possibly during Nehemiah’s absence when he returned for a while to Persia (433-424 BC).

Background: The temple had been rebuilt after 70 years of desolation (586-516 BC). However, the glorious restoration of Israel, predicted by the pre-exilic prophets, had hardly materialized. Most Jews remained voluntarily in exile. The few who had returned faced opposition from hostile neighbors, economic difficulties, and general discouragement. This had led to an apathetic participation on the worship of God. Thus, certain problems needed to be corrected:

- The people were complaining against God and thinking His worship was burdensome and unrewarded (1:2, 12-13; 2:17; 3:13-15)
- The people brought their defective animals for sacrifice (1:7-8, 13);
- The priests were corrupt (2:1-2, 8)
- The priests failed to teach the people the Law of God (2:7);
- The people were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying pagans (2:11, 14-16);
- The people were neglecting the support of the Levites and priests (3:8-10)
- The people responded cynically to the prophet, challenging most of his criticisms (1:2, 6; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 13)

In addition to rebuking the people for these things, Malachi prophesied the following:

- God has favored Israel over Edom, though both nations were equal brothers (1:2-5);
- Israel’s behavior is scandalous in view of the respect due to Him as Father & Lord (1:6);
- Though Israel disregards Him, God will receive honor even among the Gentiles (1:11, 14);
- God has made the priests contemptible in the sight of the people, because of their sins (2:9)
- Marriage is the Lord “holy institution,” a covenant intended to produce godly offspring. Therefore, He hates divorce, and regards it as treachery (2:11, 14-16)
- God will send a forerunner (Elijah) to prepare the people before Messiah comes (3:1; 4:5-6);
- Messiah will severely judge the wicked and purify Israel’s worship (3:2-5; 4:1);
- In that time of judgment, the faithful remnant will be saved (3:16-18; 4:2)