

Malachi: Intro and Overview

Introductory notes adapted from BLS 502 Interpreting the Prophets and Gospels with Carl Laney from Western Seminary

Author: The book was authored by the prophet Malachi, whose name means ***my messenger***. Malachi lived in Jerusalem late in the restoration period. Malachi delivered an ***“oracle”*** (1:1) from the Lord. Oracle means an announcement or burden. God delivered the burden of His heart to His people through His Messenger.

Date of writing: the book is not dated, yet internal evidence indicates a postexilic date. Close agreement between the sins which Malachi denounced and those which Nehemiah sought to correct (priestly laxity, neglect of tithes, and intermarriage with idolatrous women) suggests that Malachi ministered in Jerusalem between the first and second governorships of Nehemiah. A probable date for the book is ***432-431*** B.C.

Historical setting: Malachi prophesied about 75 years after the temple had been completed (515 BC). The Jews had been home from Babylon for about 100 years. Although cured of idolatry, they had lost their enthusiasm over God and worship. They had succumbed to religious ***indifference*** and moral ***laxity***. The priesthood was corrupt and the people were wearying God with their hypocrisy.

Audience: The original audience was the restored remnant of ***Israel*** who returned to Judea after the 70 years of exile in Babylon. Roughly 150,000 Jews resided in Judah after being freed from captivity. The Persians permitted worship of the Lord but the Jews faced relentless opposition from their unbelieving neighbors. After Israel returned to the land, they largely resisted idolatry, but allowed their worship to devolve into empty ritualism.

Purpose: Malachi was intended to restore the Jewish people to a right relationship with God by exposing the causes of their spiritual ***decline*** and setting forth the steps for ***renewal***.

Theme: The necessity of genuine ***repentance*** to assure God’s blessing and avert His judgment.

Theology: Malachi makes a unique contribution to OT theology by promising the coming of ***Elijah*** as Messiah’s forerunner (4:5-6)

Outline 1:

1. God’s ***love*** for Israel (1:1-5)
2. The corruption of the ***priests*** and ***people*** (1:6-2:16)
3. The coming of divine ***judgment*** (2:17-4:3)
4. The concluding exhortation and ***promise*** (4:4-6)

Outline 2:

Introduction – God’s Burden ***Delivered*** (1:1)

Oracle #1 – God’s Love ***Denied*** (1:2-5)

God’s claim, Israel’s question, God’s response

God: you do this

Israel: Oh yeah, how do we do that?

God: here’s how you do that.

– “I have loved you” but you say “how have you loved us?”

Oracle #2 – God’s Honor ***Despised*** (1:6-2:9)

v. 6 – if then I am a father, where is my honor? ... you, o priests, who despise my name...but you say, how have we despised your name?...

Oracle #3 – God’s Covenant ***Disregarded*** (2:10-16)

2:13 – He no longer accepts your offerings, but you say “why does he not?”

Oracle #4 – God’s Justice ***Delivered*** (2:17-3:6)

2:17 – you have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “how have we wearied him?”

Oracle #5 – God’s Commands ***Dismissed*** (3:7-12)

3:8 – return to me but you say “how shall we return?” ... you are robbing me, yet you say how have we robbed you?

Oracle #6 – God Promises ***Distinction*** (3:13-4:3)

3:13 – your words have been hard against me... but you say, “how have we spoken against you?

Distinction between the righteous and the wicked (v. 18)

Oracle #7 – God’s Remnant ***Delivered*** (4:4-6)

Doesn’t follow the same pattern of questions so some outlines have this not as a separate oracle but as a conclusion or summary

