



Malachi

The book of Malachi is written at a time, after the return from exile, when many of the people had stopped obeying the law or listening to God at all. According to Malachi, even the priests had stopped caring and worshipping God properly. Malachi's message is a call to repentance and a promise that God would send another messenger to the people of Israel in the future.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 11 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-5; 2.10-3.7



Genre

Prophecy



Anything tricky?

Malachi opens with a condemnation and the promise of the destruction of Edom on the grounds that they were the descendants of Esau (Jacob's brother) and therefore not chosen by God. This kind of interpretation of Old Testament stories has caused many problems in modern Middle Eastern politics – you will need to reflect on what you think about it.



Inspiring quotes

My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.

(Malachi 2.5)

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

(Malachi 3.1)

But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

(Malachi 4.2)



About the Author

Malachi simply means in Hebrew 'my messenger'. It is possible it is the prophet's name, but more likely it is a general description of what the author is to be and point to.

What do we know about him?

Nothing at all.



What kind of Book is it?

Prophecy. Malachi is a prophecy of challenge and of hope, encouraging people back to full following of the law but also pointing to another messenger who would come and show them the way.



Look out for...

The theme of the messenger – Malachi is a messenger but he also points to another one. Look out for this theme as you read.

Notice the importance of the theme of covenant to Malachi – and in particular, what he expects people to do in order to follow the covenant fully.

Malachi is scathing in his criticism of what he considers to be corrupt priests – note what it is that makes him make this judgement about the priests.



What could this mean for me?

Malachi focuses on being faithful – reflect as you read on what being faithful means for us as Christians today.



About the times

The reference to 'governor' (and the particular word used), suggests that the book is set after the exile (when Judah was ruled by governors like Nehemiah). The lax attitude to worship in the temple suggests that it might come a little after the time of Haggai and Zechariah, when the first flush of euphoria at rebuilding the temple has died away.

What were people feeling?

The book suggests that the people were feeling lax and lazy – no longer concerned to follow the law with all their heart, soul and might.

Other books set around this time

None – really. The closest are Haggai and Zechariah but this is later than them.



How is it structured?

1.1-5	The destruction of Edom
1.6–2.9	A corrupt priesthood
2.9-17	The importance of the covenant
3.1-7	The messenger that is coming
3.8-18	Giving God everything that he deserves
4.1-6	The day of the Lord



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- If Malachi were writing to the Christian church today, what practices do you think he would point to as evidence of 'unfaithfulness' and which ones would he applaud for their 'faithfulness'?
- Malachi has a lot to say about what the priests in the temple should or should not do. Can you learn anything from what he says about what Christian leaders (of all sorts) might be expected to do and be? Should these expectations apply just to leaders or to all Christians?
- Malachi says that the covenant with God was a covenant of 'life and wellbeing' – what do you think this might mean in practice?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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