

Introduction to Malachi

Where is it in the Bible?

Malachi follows Zechariah and is the thirty-ninth and last book in the Christian Old Testament. It is the twelfth book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles. In the Hebrew Bible, chapters three and four of Malachi are combined.

Who wrote it?

Almost nothing is known about this prophet. Most scholars assume that the book is anonymous and that “Malachi” may not be a proper name. In Hebrew, *malachi* means “my messenger” and is translated that way in 3:1 and not as a proper name as in 1:1.

When was it written?

The superscription (1:1) does not say anything that would help to date the book. Most scholars think that it was written after construction of the second temple was completed in 515 B.C. It may date from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah in the mid-400s since it addresses many of the same issues.

What is it about?

Malachi is concerned with the spiritual condition of the people and the priests which has deteriorated in the years following the reconstruction of the temple. He urges a return to faithfulness and obedience to God.

How is it structured?

- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. Israel Preferred over Edom (1:2-5)
- III. Corruption of the Priesthood (1:6-2:9)
- IV. Unfaithfulness to the Covenant (2:10-17)
- V. The Coming Messenger (3:1-7)
- VI. Faithful Giving and Service (3:8-18)
- VII. The Day of the Lord (4:1-6)

What are some things to look for?

- **Courtroom Drama:** Malachi takes the form of a courtroom drama with a series of debates in which God's case is laid out to the people.

A key to understanding the message of the book lies in the many rhetorical questions asked by God and the people through the messenger, Malachi. God asks: 'If I am a master, where is the honor due me?' (1:6). The people wonder: 'Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?' (2:10). These questions lay the groundwork for ongoing disputes with imagined persons that lead to rebuke, accusation, contradiction and the word of God. The book's core question, 'Where is the God of justice (2:17) gets to the heart of the anxiety affecting the people.'¹

- **LORD of Hosts:** The title "LORD of hosts" is used more often in Malachi than in any other book of the Old Testament. Almost half of the verses contain at least one occurrence of the phrase or a variation on it. Some scholars have suggested that the people of Israel, who had no army at the time, needed to be assured that the heavenly hosts (armies) were available to defend them.

1 Steed Vernyl Davidson, "Malachi" in *Lutheran Study Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009) 1590.