

Introduction to Malachi

Author	Malachi, a postexilic prophet (1:1); neither the book bearing his name nor other biblical texts convey biographical data about him
Date	440-420 BC <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conservative scholars agree in dating Malachi’s prophecy to the fifth century BC (Wolf 503). Most favor a date between 440 and 420 BC, which would make the prophet a contemporary of Nehemiah.• According to Merrill, “a date of from 433 to 425 is ... quite likely” (514). Smith leans toward a similar conclusion: “A date around the second visit of Nehemiah [to Jerusalem] is most likely. ... A date <i>ca.</i> 420 B.C. is preferable, since it is far enough away from Nehemiah’s reform to explain the failure of the two [i.e., Malachi and Nehemiah] to mention one another” (227).• Geisler suggests a range of 430-420 BC (231). VanGemeren prefers a date around 440 BC (704).
Kings Mentioned	
<i>Judah</i>	None
<i>Israel</i>	None
Nation(s) Targeted	
<i>Primary</i>	Israel in the broad sense—a nation incorporating the remnants of the northern and southern kingdoms, as evidenced by direct references to Israel (1:1; 2:11; 2:16; 4:4) and Jacob (1:2; 2:12; 3:6); references to the temple service abound, especially in chapters 1-2, and Judah and Jerusalem are mentioned together twice (2:11; 3:4), but these reflect their place within the covenant that Yahweh established with his people Israel
<i>Secondary</i>	Edom (1:2-5)
Representative Texts	1:1-11; 2:7-14; 2:17-3:3; 3:7-10; 3:13-16; 4:1-2; 4:5-6
Core Message	<p>The remnant of Israel is struggling to live out its identity as Yahweh’s chosen people after returning from exile. God commissions Malachi to address Israel’s misgivings and objections. Yahweh loves his people, contrasting with his disdain for Edom. The nation’s priests approach the temple sacrifices flippantly. The Lord, who is worthy of universal adoration, disapproves of their worship and indicts them for their failed spiritual leadership. Israel’s men dishonor the covenant by intermarrying with pagans and practicing divorce—both sins that weaken the social fabric.</p> <p>The people perceive that Yahweh unjustly tolerates evil. He assures them that he will return to his temple to purify his own and judge the wicked; a messenger will precede him in his coming. The people are commanded to return to the Lord and give tithes and offerings. They object that God fails to bless devotion, but he</p>

promises that those who fear him will indeed inherit his kingdom, whereas evildoers will be consumed.

**New Testament
References¹**

1:2-3 (Rom. 9:13)
3:1 (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27)
4:5-6 (Luke 1:17)

Features

“The name ‘Malachi’ (Heb. *mal’āki*) means ‘my messenger’” (Wolf 504). The meaning of the name is significant in that the book makes three references to messengers. The priest is regarded as Yahweh’s messenger (2:7). Malachi 3:1 states that “my messenger” will prepare the Lord’s way before him—a prophecy that the New Testament (e.g., Luke 7:27) sees as fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. The same verse also alludes to “the messenger of the covenant,” an identifier that many take as messianic (Wolf 504-05; VanGemeren 709).

According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, “The literary format of Malachi is unique among the OT prophetic books. The prophet’s entire message is cast in a rhetorical style known as ‘diatribe’ or ‘disputation speech’ (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 529). This style consists of three sequential parts: an initial claim, an anticipated objection from the audience, and a rejoinder. This rhetorical cycle occurs six times throughout the book (529; Smith 228).

Sources

Beale, G. K., and D. A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Baker Academic, 2007.

Geisler, Norman L. *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*. Baker Book House, 1977.

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Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. InterVarsity, 1998.

Smith, Gary V. “Malachi.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, fully revised, vol. 3, Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 226-28.

VanGemeren, Willem A. “Malachi.” *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Books, 2000, pp. 704-12.

Wolf, Herbert M. “Malachi, Theology of.” *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Books, 2000, pp. 503-05.

¹ New Testament citations of texts from Malachi were identified in part by consulting Beale and Carson’s *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.