

Malachi

Malachi marks the close of Old Testament prophecy, and the beginning of four hundred years of silence between the Old and New Testaments. Having learned little from their captivity, the people soon lapse into many of the same sins that resulted in their exile in the first place: covetousness, idolatry, mixed marriages with pagan people, abuse of the poor, and calloused hearts. In a question-and-answer format, Malachi highlights Judah's hardheartedness and pronounces God's curse upon all who practice such things. It will remain for John the Baptist (the promised forerunner who would come in the power and spirit of Elijah) to bring a hope-filled message, "Behold! The Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

INTRODUCTION

Malachi, a prophet in the days of Nehemiah, directs his message of judgment to a people plagued with corrupt priests, wicked practices, and a false sense of security in their privileged relationship with God. Using the question-and-answer method, Malachi probes deeply into their problems of hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, false worship, and arrogance. So sinful has the nation become that God's words to the people no longer have any impact. For four hundred years after Malachi's ringing condemnations, God remains silent. Only with the coming of John the Baptist (3:1) does God again communicate to His people through a prophet's voice.

The meaning of the name *Malaki* ("My Messenger") is probably a shortened form of *Malakya*, "Messenger of Yahweh," and it is appropriate to the book which speaks of the coming of the "messenger of the covenant" ("messenger" is mentioned three times; see 2:7; 3:1).

AUTHOR

The only Old Testament mention of Malachi is in chapter 1, verse 1. The authorship, date, and unity of Malachi have never been seriously challenged. The unity of the book can be seen in the dialectic style that binds it together. Nothing is known of Malachi (not even his father's name), but a Jewish tradition says that he was a member of the Great Synagogue.

DATE & SETTING

Although an exact date cannot be established for Malachi, internal evidence can be used to deduce an approximate date. The Persian term for governor, *pechah* (1:8; cf. Neh. 5:14; Hag. 1:1, 14; 2:21) indicates that this book was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539–333 b.c.). Sacrifices were being offered in the temple (1:7–10; 3:8), which was rebuilt in 516 b.c. Evidently many years had passed since the offerings were instituted, because the priests had grown tired of them and corruptions had crept into the system. In addition, Malachi's oracle was inspired by the same problems that Nehemiah faced: corrupt priests (1:6–2:9; Neh. 13:1–9); neglect of tithes and offerings (3:7–12; Neh. 13:10–13); and intermarriage with pagan wives (2:10–16; Neh. 13:23–28). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 444 b.c. to rebuild the city walls, thirteen years after Ezra's return and reforms (457 b.c.). Nehemiah returned to Persia in 432 b.c., but came back to Palestine about 425 b.c., and dealt with the sins described in Malachi. It is therefore likely that Malachi proclaimed his message while Nehemiah was absent between 432 b.c. and 425 b.c., almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy (520 b.c.).