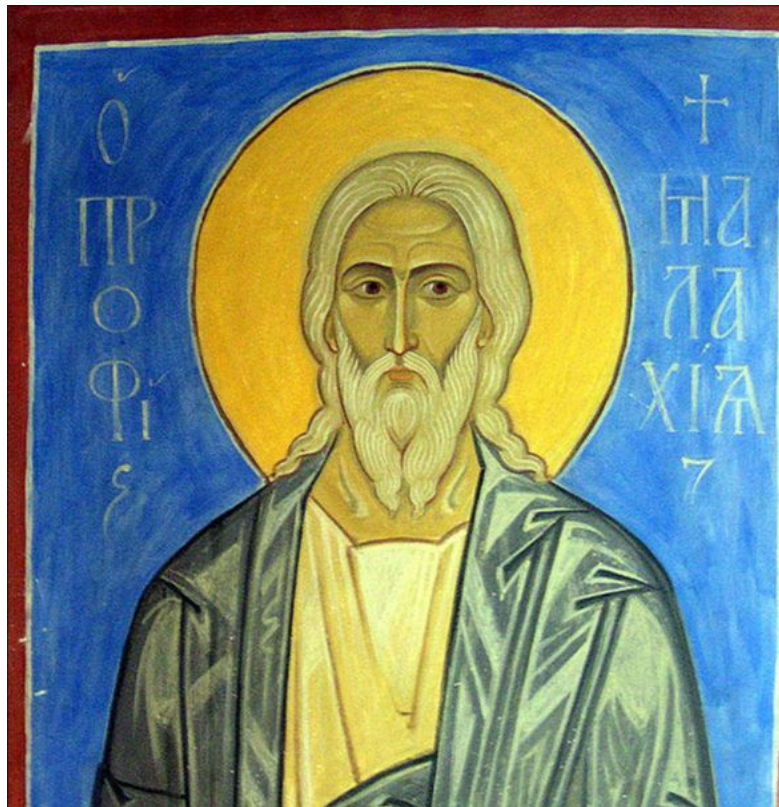


# *The Book of Malachi*

## *Bible Studies*



*St. John's Brunswick West*  
*2024*

## *A timeline for Malachi*

- 597BC** A deportation from Judah to Babylon  
**593** Ezekiel's visions commence  
Daniel's work in Babylon underway  
**587** Babylon destroys Jerusalem  
**539** Babylon conquered by King Cyrus of Persia  
**537** Cyrus permits Jews and others to return to their homelands  
**536 to 515** The second temple is built in Jerusalem  
**520** Haggai's prophecy  
**519** Zechariah's prophecy  
**490** The battle of Marathon (The Persian empire declines while Greece rises)  
**458** Ezra leads exiles to Judah from Babylon (Ezra 7:8-9/Neh 9:32-38)  
**445 to 432** Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Work starts on rebuilding the walls  
*Malachi likely prophesised during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah*

### *Sermon Series:*

14 April	Mal 1:1-5	I have loved you
21 April	Mal 1:6-2:9	I want to give you life and peace
28 April	Mal 2:10-16	But your faith is broken
5 May	Mal 2:17-3:5	Yet I will send you a messenger
12 May	Mal 3:6-12	So return to me and I will return to you
[19 May]		
[26 May]		
2 June	Mal 3:13-4:6	Because it is not futile to serve God
9 June	Mal 4:1-6	For I will come to you

### *Bible study passages:*

18 April	Mal 1:1-14
2 May	Mal 2:1-16
16 May	Mal 2:17-3:12
6 June	Mal 3:13-4:6

## 1. Malachi, book and prophet (from Peter Adam's commentary)

The book of Malachi sits aptly in our Bibles as the last book of the Old Testament, for it looks back to the Old Testament and assumes, summarizes and applies its message. But it also looks forward to the New Testament, with its promises of the coming reign of God.

One of the book's most striking features is the way in which every word of God is contradicted or questioned by God's people. This is the deep structure of the book, and its recurring theme. Contradicting God and his words was unfortunately characteristic of this contrary people! Whatever God said, they contradicted by questions. Here are examples:

- *I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have you loved us?' (Mal. 1:2–3)*
- *priests, [you] despise my name. You say, 'How have we despised your name?' By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, 'How have we polluted it?' (Mal. 1:6–7)*
- *You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied him?' By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.' Or by asking, 'Where is the God of justice?' (Mal. 2:17)*
- *Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' (Mal. 3:7–8)*
- *You have spoken harsh words against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' (Mal. 3:13)*

We see here the persistence of God in speaking to his people, and also the gap between what God thinks and what the people think. God through the prophet reveals his thoughts, and contrasts them by articulating the thoughts and words of his people. In this book we have a clear picture of grace and sin in close proximity.

Another striking feature is that God's people appear to be reluctantly serving God, in a half-hearted kind of way. They are neither energetic enough to serve him whole-heartedly, nor to engage in blatant disobedience. It is hardly satisfactory for them, as it is hardly satisfactory for God!

We may find ourselves in a church like that, in which case Malachi is a very apt book. But even in the case of a church full of young enthusiastic believers, who need restraining not goading, Malachi is still useful as a warning for the future, or as training in ministry to people who are more half-hearted.

The word Malachi means, 'my messenger', which is a good name for a prophet. Some think that it is not a name but a title, but I assume here that it is the prophet's name.

Malachi prophesied after the people of God had returned from exile in Babylon and settled in Jerusalem and Judah. The temple has been rebuilt (1:10), and there is a (Persian) governor (1:8). Though no date is given for the

prophecy, the problem of divorce (2:10–16) was also present in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. And reluctance to provide for the temple in Malachi (1:6–14) is also present in Nehemiah 13:10–13. So it looks as if Malachi prophesied around that time, though his name is not mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah, although these books do mention Haggai and Zechariah.<sup>2</sup> (See table opposite.)

Malachi probably gave his prophecy sometime between 460 and 400 BC.

## **2. Malachi for us today**

There are three ways in which this book is the word of the Lord for us today.

First, Malachi saw that at the heart of God's people, the church, must lie a deep, radical, and overwhelming conviction that God loves them. Without this at our heart, we are lost.

Second, Malachi knew that the greatest sin of God's people is the sin against God. We easily get confused about sin. We see that we can sin against ourselves, and harm ourselves. We see that we can sin against others, and harm them. But we find it harder to take seriously our sin against God. Yet here is the fundamental sin, the source of all sin....

Third, in Malachi's day the people of God were in a mess. While they were not actually running away from God, and were not worshipping idols, as they had in the past, they seemed to lack the energy to serve God wholeheartedly. They tried to live in neutral territory, neither serving God too enthusiastically, nor turning away from God too enthusiastically. In this they were self-deceived. They thought they were in a grey no-man's land, where they neither needed to respond whole-heartedly to God, nor refuse him. In fact they were in a vicious circle, a terrifying whirlpool, sinking further and further to destruction. Malachi is God's effective remedy for such a situation among the people of God.

## **Malachi 1:1-14**

1. Given the setting of Malachi, why would God have said that he loved Israel (v.2) and why would they have questioned it (v.2)?
2. What was the point of referring to Jacob and Esau (vv.2-3)? How is that relevant to God's love?
3. How has Israel failed to honour God in Malachi's time by their sins and missed opportunities? Why are the priests singled out?
4. What do you think would be some modern equivalents of these failures to honour him? In what way do God's people fail to honour him today?
5. What does God's name mean (vv.11, 14) and why is that important?
6. In v.10, God seems to wish that they would put a stop to temple services, and to sacrifices and religious offerings. Does this mean that God does not like religious practices? If not, what does it mean?
7. What is God's broader goal in vv.13-14?

## **Malachi 2:1-16**

1. What does God threaten to do to the priests and why (vv.1-2)?
2. If the priests were like this, why does God persevere with them (vv.3-6)?
3. What do vv.6-8 tell us about a fuller understanding of the role of the priests? What specific charges does God level against the priests in vv.8-9?
4. Why does v.10 introduce the themes of a common father and creator for the people of God? How is this filled out in v.15?
5. Why would it be unfaithful to marry a woman who worships a foreign God (vv.11-12)? How does this apply today?
6. What do we learn in vv.14-16 about God's attitude to marriage and divorce? How do you see this filled out elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Exod 21:10-11; Deut 24:1-4; Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-10; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:8-28)?
7. Why is there a double mention of 'be on guard and do not be unfaithful' in vv.15, 16?

## **Malachi 2:17-3:12**

1. How did Israel weary God with their words (2:17)? Do God's people today weary God with our words?
2. Given what has been said earlier in the book, why would God send them a messenger (3:1)?
3. Verses 2-4 describe the day of this messenger's coming, or perhaps the day of the Lord's coming. What will it be like?
4. What specific charges are made in 3:5?
5. What is meant by 'I the Lord do not change.' (v.6) Why is this statement important to the argument? How is this connected to the solution in v.7?
6. How does God address the issues of tithes, offerings and giving in vv.8-12? Do you think that v.10 supports a prosperity gospel or not? Why?
7. How should we address giving in our context today?

## **Malachi 3:13-4:6**

1. What is wrong with what the people have said in vv.13-14? To what extent do we in the church today still make these mistakes?
2. What is going on in v.16? How does lead on to vv.17-18?
3. What is the significance of the phrase ‘my treasured possession’ in v.17?
4. How is the day of the Lord described in 4:1-3? What does this mean for us today?
5. Why would they need to remember the laws given by Moses so long ago? What should be the attitude of the Christian to the OT law?
6. What is meant by the promise of sending Elijah as the forerunner to the day of the Lord? How does this relate to the promise of a messenger in 3:1?
7. How does the NT pick up this saying about Elijah (e.g. Matt 11:10, 14; John 1:21)?