

Who was Malachi in the Bible?

Malachi was an Old Testament prophet and the last of the writing prophets. He wrote the book of Malachi probably between 440 and 400 BC. Very little is known about Malachi the man except what can be inferred from his public messages, recorded in his book.

Malachi's name means "my messenger," an appropriate title for a prophet, one of God's messengers. Malachi wrote to the remnant of Israelites who had returned after 70 years in Babylonian captivity. He ministered during the time of Nehemiah and after the time of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The temple had been rebuilt, and the people of Israel were once again in the Promised Land, but they were falling into sin again.

Malachi wrote, and we can assume spoke, in a bold, direct manner. He rebukes the sins of the priests and people of Judah: the priests had been derelict in their official duties; the people had divorced their rightful wives; they had married foreign wives; they doubted God's justice; and they were neglecting to pay their tithes, bringing various plagues upon the land. Despite Israel's doubts to the contrary, Malachi assures them that the Lord God still loves them (Malachi 1:2-5).

The prophet Malachi brought a message of judgment upon the people because they had not learned from the consequences of their past sins. He communicates in a distinct style: in several places, he first makes an assertion, then he anticipates an objection made by those who hear him, and then he refutes the rhetorical objection. Malachi does this eight times in his book. Each time, he uses the same wording: "But you ask" or "But you say." An example of this debating style is found in Malachi 1:6-7:

"It is you priests who show contempt for my name.

"But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'

“By offering defiled food on my altar.”

The book that Malachi wrote is distinguished as being the only prophetic book that ends not in deliverance but judgment; in fact, it ends with the word curse. Part of Malachi's ministry was to prepare the hearts of God's people and the way for John the Baptist, who would then prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord (Malachi 3:1; 4:5). The book of Malachi brings the Old Testament to a close with a prediction of the Messiah. Following Malachi's ministry, 400 years passed, during which there was no divine prophet. But then the New Testament opens and a new day dawns, bringing John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment of the prophecies of Malachi.