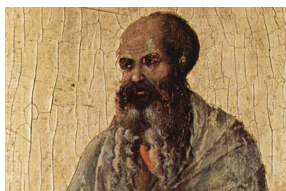


MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

Introduction to Malachi



Malachi is the one of the so called Minor Prophets, due not to their importance, but rather the length of their writings. We have no record of anyone in the Old or New Testament named Malachi outside of this man, so all we can learn of him comes from this book which bears his name. The name Malachi means “my messenger” or “messenger of God.”

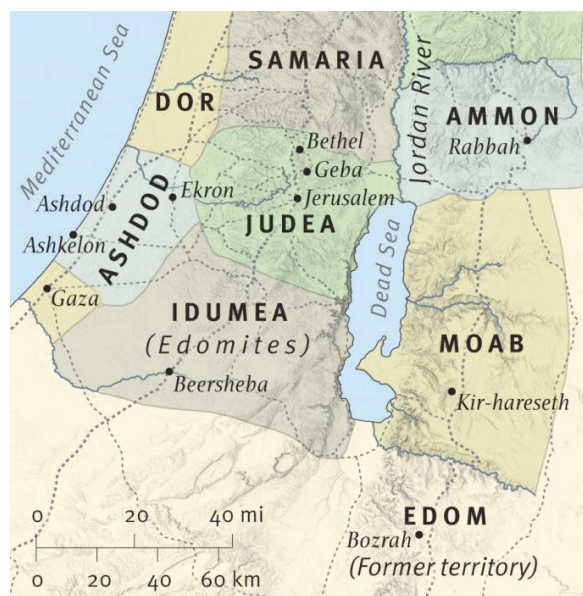
We cannot date the book of Malachi with absolute certainty since nothing in the book provides an exact dating we can make a reasonable estimate based on what God addresses through Malachi. For our study we will assume that this book which is the last in the Old Testament was likely written between 432 and 425 BC.¹

A date for Malachi in the mid fifth century BC would make Malachi a contemporary of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther and places this book about 100 years after the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC which ended the Babylonian captivity and allowed the Jews to return home and to rebuild the temple. We call these who have returned to Judah the postexilic Jews since this happens following their exile in Babylon. As the last book of the Old Testament Malachi looks back to Moses and the Old Covenant and looks forward to the New Testament and the coming Messiah.

During this time the Jews were not a faithful people so Malachi’s message is one of judgment. The theme of this book is God’s sovereign love; a love that was rejected by both the priests and the people.

The postexilic Jews were not as consumed with idolatry as those in past centuries, but their faith had become lifeless and indifferent. They had lost their zeal for the Lord. They did not openly rebel against God, but they served him in a half-hearted manner.

The matter of a tepid faith is one of the most relevant messages from Malachi for Christians today. There are many who name themselves as Christians who are happy to “go to church” and say they are Christians, but lack any real heart-felt conviction to love and serve God.



Land of Judah in the mid 5th century BC

¹ Smith, James E. Postexilic Prophets. Lulu, 2007, p. 264.

1. What was the problem of the Laodicean Christians according to Revelation 3:14-22 and what warning was given?

The format that Malachi follows pictures 1) God making an indictment against the Jews for their unfaithful actions. 2) The people respond asking how God's accusations can be true. 3) God answers their questions and expands the indictment.

God Loves Israel 1:1-5

2. What four facts do we learn about the Book of Malachi in 1:1?

Outline of Malachi

1. Introduction defending the reality of God's love for Israel. (1:1-5)
2. The priest's sin against love. (1:6-2:9)
3. The people's sin against love. (2:10-4:3)
4. Summary (4:4-6)

The word that is translated as "oracle" in the ESV is more literally "a burden." The word can be understood to mean that the work of the prophet is a burden by its nature as a great responsibility, but the more important idea is that Malachi has a message from the Lord.

God addresses his people as "Israel." Though the postexilic remnant of Jews were in Judah, and there was no longer a nation of Israel, God addresses them as Israel, the entire covenant people of God.

Verse 1 tells us that the message Malachi brings is from the Lord. In nearly half of the remaining 54 verses of Malachi the phrases "says the Lord of hosts," "says the Lord," etc." are used. It is critically important that all Israel knows that this is the message of God.

3. What is the significance of the fact that in nearly half the verses of Malachi, the people are reminded that it is God who is making the declaration?



Verse 2 is the beginning of six rhetorical disputations between God and Israel. Each disputation is a call to covenant faithfulness. These questions, answers, and rebuttals give the feel of a courtroom scene throughout the book. These are rhetorical disputations meaning that the answers of Israel to God's charges are already known by their previous lack of repentance and by their current actions and attitudes.

Disputation #1

Assertion: God says "I have loved you."

Objection by Israel: "How have you loved us?"

God's Response: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated."

In this first disputation recorded by Malachi, Israel doubted God's love. These were difficult days for Israel. After returning from exile they lived in poverty, did not have their own king, were subject to Persia, and were small and weak. In the mid 5th century BC Judea covered area of about 32 x 48 km and had a population of about 150,000.

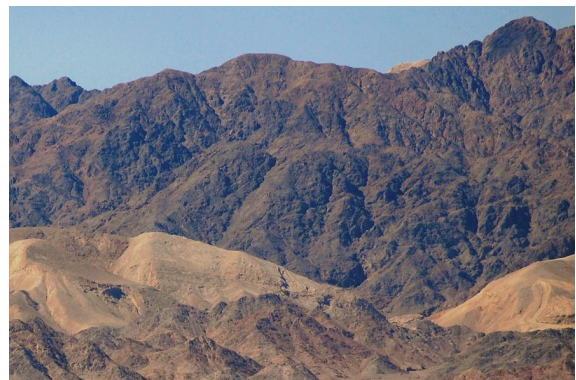
The short memories of the people led them to conclude that God did not love them. After all, if God really loved them why didn't they have their own king? Why must they be subject to Persia? Why were they poor, small, and weak? The Israelites felt a distance from the God who says "I have loved you" and had difficult reconciling this love with what they viewed as their current circumstances.

4. Why do people often have short memories when it comes to recalling all that God has done for them?

In God's expanded response to Israel he points out that though Jacob and Esau were brothers, his favour had been on Jacob and not Esau and this had continued to their descendants who became the nations of Israel and Edom. The words "love" and "hate" are not used as words of emotion, but words that indicate political and strategic alliances and indicates God's blessing or the withholding of blessing. Jacob and his offspring are the covenant people of God and as such are loved and blessed by God.

5. In verse 3, how does God describe the present condition of the Edomites (the nation descended from Esau?)

In the first chapter of Obadiah we see the promise of God to destroy the land of Edom. Now in Malachi 1:3 (about fifty years later) we see the prophecy has come to pass. Though Edom was laid to waste not all the Edomites were killed and those who were left vowed to rebuild.



6. How does God respond to the Edomites vow to rebuild (vs 4)?

The promise of God concerning the Edomites was proved true and their nation was never restored. They were defeated through the years by the Nabateans, the Macedonians, the Maccabees, the Romans, and the Arabs.² The Israelites who claimed that God did not love them were slowly rebuilding after returning home. God was continuing to show his favour upon Israel, but not on Edom.

7. How do Edom's neighbours describe them in verse 4?

² Ibid. p. 274.

- 8. What will be the response of Israel when they see the condition of Edom compared to their own condition?**
- 9. What are some reasons today why people think that God does not love them and how should we answer their doubts?**

Verse 5 saw partial fulfilment physically as Israel could see God's blessings, but the real purpose for God's love for Israel would be seen when he sends his own Son as Messiah. Jesus comes into this world and lives in Israel, but the knowledge of his greatness and the blessing of his salvation encompasses the globe.