

# THE BOOK OF MALACHI – AN INTRODUCTION

*“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” Malachi 3:6*

**AUTHOR:** the prophet Malachi (1:1)

- We have no background information on the prophet other than his name which means “my messenger” (1:1).
- The word “oracle” means “burden” (1:1). God delivered the burden of His heart to His people through His messenger.

**AUDIENCE:** the restored remnant of Israel who returned to Judea after 70 years of exile in Babylon

- Roughly 150,000 Jews resided in Judah after being freed from captivity.
- The Persians permitted worship of YHWH but the Jews faced relentless opposition from their unbelieving neighbors.
- After Israel returned to the land, they largely resisted idolatry,<sup>1</sup> but allowed their worship to devolve into empty ritualism.

**DATE:** likely between 460-420BC.

- This postexilic prophet lacks defining a characteristic that assists us in determining an exact date of authorship.
- The “minor prophets” are arranged in chronological order placing Malachi after Haggai (520BC) and Zechariah (520-518BC).
- The issues Malachi addressed regarding temple worship almost certainly occurred after its building completion (516BC).
- Many of the issues addressed by Malachi were prevalent during the ministries of Ezra (458BC) and Nehemiah (445-420BC). This included the corrupt priesthood (Neh. 13:4-9, Mal. 1:6-2:9), marriage to idolaters (Ezra 9:1-15; Mal. 2:10-16), abuse of the less fortunate (Neh. 5:1-13; Mal. 3:5), and withholding tithes from the Lord (Neh. 10:32, 13:10-14; Mal. 3:6-12).

**BACKGROUND:**

- **605-586BC** – Judah taken to captivity in 3 waves by Babylon King Nebuchadnezzar; temple destroyed (2 Chron. 36:17-21)
- **539BC** – King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonian King and took over his vast empire (Dan. 5:30-31)
- **538BC** – King Cyrus issued a decree freeing Jewish exiles to return to their ancestral home (2 Chron. 36:22, Ezra 1:1)
- **537BC** – 1<sup>st</sup> group of 49,897 exiles (Ezra 2:64-65) returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6) led by Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, Jeshua
- **536BC** – The temple began to be rebuilt until pressure from Samaritan and Persian opponents led Israel to stop working
- **536-520BC** – Spiritual apathy and misplaced priorities led the people to use their freedom to build their own homes.
- **521-486BC** – Darius I (Darius the Great) ruled as the 3<sup>rd</sup> King of the Persian Empire  
Prophets Haggai and Zechariah called the nation to repent of their apathy toward God’s call to rebuild the temple.
- **515 BC** – Temple was completed and dedicated in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:16-18)
- **485-464BC** – Events in **Esther** took place in Persia recounting God’s faithfulness to the Jews who remained there
- **458BC** – Ezra led a 2<sup>nd</sup> small wave of a few thousand Jewish exiles out of Babylon and back to Jerusalem (Ezra ch. 7-10)
- **446/444BC** – Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem with 3<sup>rd</sup> small group of exiles (Neh. 2:11) and rebuilds the wall (Neh. 6:15).
- **336-323BC** – Alexander the Great ruled as the king of Macedonia and overthrew the Persian empire

**PURPOSE:** To call the nation to repent of the empty worship that dishonored God and invoked His covenant curses.

- The Lord desires the nation to be burdened by their sin so they will repent and be ready to receive their Messiah (4:4-6).

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<sup>1</sup> According to 2:11 idolatry remained a lingering issue, but it was not the primary source of Israel’s disobedience.

# AN OUTLINE OF MALACHI: ORACLE AGAINST EMPTY RELIGION

**Introduction – God’s Burden Delivered (1:1)**

**Oracle #1 – God’s Love Denied (1:2-5)**

**Oracle #2 – God’s Honor Despised (1:6-2:9)**

**Oracle #3 – God’s Covenant Disregarded (2:10-16)**

**Oracle #4 – God’s Justice Delivered (2:17-3:6)**

**Oracle #5 – God’s Commands Dismissed (3:7-12)**

**Oracle #6 – God Promises Distinction (3:13-4:3)**

**Oracle #7 – God’s Remnant Delivered (4:4-6)**

Judea in the Days of Malachi (620BC)

