

The Prophets

Lesson #55

Introduction To Malachi

I. **Structure Of Malachi**

- A. The book of Malachi is a short prophetic book of the Old Testament written to rebuke the people of Israel for their shallow worship practices. Portions of Malachi was written in the format of a debate, unlike any other book of the Bible. God first makes a statement of truth that is then denied by the people. God then refutes their argument in great detail, restating and proving the truth of His original statement (1:2-7; 2:10-17; 3:7-10).
- B. Malachi also uses questions and answers freely to focus his accusations toward the priesthood as well as the people. These features make Malachi one of the most argumentative books of the Bible, and therefore he is known as the "prophet of accusation."

II. **Authorship And Date**

- A. Some scholars believe that Malachi should be interpreted as a description ("my messenger") rather than as the name of a specific person. This occurs partly because Malachi's name does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. This line of reasoning concludes that the book was written by an unknown author. However, no other book of prophecy in the Old Testament was written anonymously. Although nothing else is known about this person, the weight of tradition has assumed the book was written by prophet named Malachi.
- B. It is almost universally accepted that the author was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, and wrote about 445 or 432 B.C.

III. **Historical Setting**

- A. Malachi was addressed to the nation of Israel about 100 years after its return from captivity in Babylon. The temple, which had been rebuilt and dedicated in 516 B.C., was standing and the routine of sacrifice had been long in operation. At first the people had been enthusiastic about rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple and restoring their system of worship.
- B. However, their zeal soon began to wane. They wondered about God's love for them as His chosen people. They began to offer defective animals as sacrifice and to withhold their tithes and offerings. Malachi was written to call the people back to authentic worship of their Redeemer. These were also the conditions mentioned in Nehemiah's day (Nehemiah 3:5; 5:1-13).

IV. ***Scriptural Contribution***

- A. The prophecy of Malachi is noted for its vivid portrayal of the love of God as well as His might and power. Israel needed to be reminded of these truths at a time when widespread doubt had dashed its expectations of the Messiah.
- B. Whether Malachi ever delivered the contents of his book as sermons is difficult to say. In any case, the substantial elements which compose it are closely knit together, being the work obviously of a legal pleader and of a moral reasoner who had a definite and detailed plan of argumentation.
- C. Malachi has been termed the "Hebrew Socrates." His style, which was popular among the Jews, was known as the didactic-dialectic method. This style later became universal in the Jewish schools and in the synagogue. First he makes a charge or an accusation; then he fancies some one raising an objection, which he next proceeds to refute in detail, substantiating the truth of his original proposition.

V. ***Special Considerations***

- A. Malachi's primary aim to his own age was to encourage an already disheartened people who were presumably disappointed that Haggai's and Zechariah's optimistic predictions concerning the Messianic kingdom had not been fulfilled. A serious reaction had set in and men were beginning to doubt God's providence. On the other hand, his spiritual aim was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.
- B. Malachi leaves us with the feeling that the story is not yet finished, that God still has promises to fulfill on behalf of His people. After Malachi came 400 long years of silence. Yet when the time was right (Galatians 4:4), heaven would burst forth in song at the arrival of the Messiah.