

## MALACHI – SHORT VERSION

**Historical context.** Malachi is the last book of the Twelve Minor Prophets and the final book of the Old Testament in its current setup. The word Malachi means “my [God’s] messenger.”

Scholars believe that this book was written around 450BC, just before the time of the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. These reforms, which the survival of the Jewish faith was contingent on, presupposed the prophetic word of a virtually unknown prophet, Malachi.

In its introduction to this book, *The People’s Bible* states:

*Malachi is written for a postexilic community experiencing deep divisions. Those in charge of the leadership—priests and powerful people—are forgetting their responsibilities and acting in ways that advance their own agendas. The priests are accepting sacrifices of lesser quality and perhaps using the good animals for their own benefit (1:7-8). The rich and affluent are divorcing their Jewish wives and entering into marital agreements with the leading families of the surrounding territories for economic self-aggrandizement (2:10-16). People are holding back their tithes, jeopardizing the temple’s function as a center of redistribution of food for the poor (3:8-10). In the process, laborers are defrauded of their wages, widows and orphans are being oppressed, aliens are deprived of justice (3:5), and women are the objects of violence through unjust divorces (2:16). And the most astonishing thing is that the leaders of the people are surprised when God disputes with them and accuses them of all these things. They even wonder where the God of justice is (2:17). Therefore the prophet announces a day of retribution and judgment when God will come to the temple to purify the priesthood and make sure that the people will bring the appropriate offerings. On that day God will also secure a group of faithful ones who revere the Lord’s name. The new age, which will dawn after God’s coming, will be anticipated by the coming of the prophet Elijah. This act became important for the writers of the New Testament, who saw in John the Baptist the fulfillment of this prophecy. (p.1111)*

So Malachi, in his prophet ministry, is faced with a wall of apathy and indifference. He preaches to a disillusioned people and a failed leadership. He is primarily concerned with the lack of devotion and seriousness in Temple worship and over Judah’s sin fidelity in her social relationships.

**Division of chapters.** The three chapters of the book contain six oracles followed by two postscripts. The six oracles are in the form of disputations or arguments in which the opening statement is made by God. The people’s response expresses some form of objection or questioning of God’s statement. Then God responds with a rebuke and a promise of judgment.