I. AUTHOR

A. Was "Malachi" a person by that name, or is the term a title referring to an anonymous author? — מַלְחָיָה, ma-li-kî, can be translated as:

1. "Malachi" — a proper name
2. "Malachi" — "my messenger"

B. Evidence for "Malachi"

1. The word מַלְחָיָה, ma-li-kî, is comparable to other Hebrew names that end in -î:
   a. Beeri, “my well,” Gen 26:34; Hos. 1:1
   b. Ethni, “my gift,” 1 Ch. 6:41

C. Evidence for "my messenger"

1. Early textual variants cast some doubt on this position.
   a. The LXX did not translate מַלְחָיָה, ma-li-kî, as a proper name.
   b. Instead the rendered it "his messenger, angel" (ἄγγελος αὐτοῦ, angelou autou).
   c. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uziel stated that Ezra the scribe was "my messenger" in Mal. 1:1.
   d. Jerome and Calvin, in the prefaces to their commentaries supported this view.
   e. Rashi and T. B. Megillah 15a recorded a similar view
   f. Rabbi Nahinan said that Malachi was really Mordecai, Esther's relative (Est. 10:3).
2. **Other evidence:**

   a. Westermann has convincingly demonstrated that prophets made use of a message formula and enveloped their pronouncements in the messenger style.

      (1) At the same time he argued that pre-exilic prophets never considered themselves messengers because was impossible

      (2) Such a messenger would himself need to be a divine being.

      (3) Such views are reflected in the Hebrew and Greek terms themselves

      (4) Both יָ֣נֵק הָאָנָּגֶל, mal'akî and ἄγγελος, angelos, may refer to a human or a divine messenger

   b. *NRS Malachi 3:1* ¶ See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me

      (1) This verse may serve as a commentary on 1:1

      (2) The term used here is identical to 1:1

      (3) Evidently, in post-exilic times had inherent in them the characteristics which allowed human beings to be considered as messengers from a deity.

      (4) Divinity of kings and heavenly essence were not mutually exclusive concepts.

   c. This context allows us to see a blending between the heavenly and the human in the post-exilic messenger prophets

      (1) One of the characteristics of apocalyptic is that of sending divine figures, which is not unlike the divine messenger.

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(2) Further, implied in messenger imagery is communication over a distance.

(3) The very fact that a messenger is sent means that the one who sends the messenger (a) is not with the person to whom the messenger is sent and (b) cannot come due to some circumstance.

(4) **Hag 1:12-13** emphasizes this fact — "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared before the Lord. Then **Haggai, the messenger of the Lord**, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, “I am with you says the Lord.”

(a) The people are in need of encouragement.
(b) They needed to feel that God was with them.
(c) Thus Haggai the prophet is called "the messenger of the Lord," and the Lord's message is “I am with you.”


(a) "(1) Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the Lord of hosts. (2) But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears."
(b) Here the messenger is perceived as coming from a distance, true.
(c) But “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” also.
(d) The Lord, whom the people perceive as far off, will one day be near at hand.

(e) This will take place suddenly.

(f) The messenger imagery seems to be used in an attempt to imply the nearness of God.

(g) The text emphasizes “he is coming,” as if the Lord was en route at that moment.

(h) For those who perceived God as far off, to be told by one of his messengers, “I am with you,” or to perceive his messenger as en route, preparing the way for the Lord would be encouraging indeed.

(i) Added to this is the fact that the nation had a long tradition in which God had sent divine messengers, and prophets who used messenger speech.

(j) Therefore, such circumstances would allow the people to attach finally the epithet to the prophets, so that the term “messenger” eclipsed not only "prophet," but the name of the individual prophet as well.

(k) This is seen in Mal 1:1, “The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi [i.e., my messenger].”

D. So the book provides very little information about the prophet.

1. Presumably he lived in or near Jerusalem and had an intimate knowledge of worship practices in the temple (1:6-2:9).

2. Pseudo-Epiphanius recorded the view that he was a Levite from the tribe of Zebulun.

3. His message demonstrates his concern for proper spiritual leadership (2:1-9) as well as popular morality (vv. 10-16; 3:5).
4. He was traditional in his application of the Torah to life and forthright in his demands for holiness and performance of duty.

II. THE BOOK — no date is given for the book making the use of the internal evidence of primary importance.

A. Outline of the Message — the book consists of 6 oracles which focus on the problems faced by the community due to their misunderstanding of the nature and character of God.

1. “I have loved you” (1:2-5).
   a. Malachi countered the Israelites’ skepticism by reminding them of God’s love for them.
   b. Although Deuteronomy emphasizes this teaching (4:37; 7:7f.; 10:15), the prophet chose to contrast God’s election of Jacob with His rejection of Esau because God had verified his anger toward Edom in recent historical events.
   c. God’s anger that caused Edom’s destruction would prevent all attempts to rebuild that nation (Mal 1:3ff.).
   d. Earlier prophets had told that God’s hatred for Edom was due to the Edomites’ sins against Israel (Obad; Ezek 35:1-15).
   e. God’s anger is proof of His greatness (Mal. 1:5) and love for His people.

   a. Such love and greatness requires a response of fear and love (Deut 5: 6:11:1, 13; 30:15, 19f.), but the priests despised God and did not even give Him the honor due a father or master (Mal 1:6ff).
   b. They could not expect God to be gracious to them if they continued to offer sick and lame sacrifices (vv. 8f.)
   c. Better not to sacrifice at all (v. 10) than to go through the motions with an unworthy offering (vv. 12f.).
d. God is the King feared among the nations (vv. 11-14), but where was His honor in Israel?

e. These accusations are followed by a threat: God would curse the priests if they did not glorify Him (2:1-3).

f. The warning was given so that the priests would honor and fear God (v. 5), be true messenger of His law (vv. 6-9), and continue His covenant with Levi (vv. 4f.; cf. Exod 33:26-29; Num 25:11-13; Jer 33:12).

3. "Why are we faithless to one another?" (2.10-16):

a. Faithlessness was contrary to the natural and spiritual unity (by creation and the covenant) between God and Israel and among the individual Israelites.

b. Marriages with heathen women (vv. 11f. and divorce (vv. 13-15) were faithless acts that destroyed this unity; God could no accept the offerings from disunified homes.

4. “Where is the God of justice?” (2:17-3:5):

a. In spite of God’s love and the people’s unfaithfulness, some accused Him of injustice because He did not judge the wicked (2:17).

b. God assured the nation that He would judge the wicked priests (3:1 as well as those who mistreated others (v. 5).

c. These people would learn to fear and please God when the "coming one" appeared to purify the nation (vv. 1-4) and establish justice,

5. “Return to me and I will return to you” (3:6-12):

a. The famine (3:11) that had already struck the nation illustrated the justice of God.
b. Because He is consistent in His judgment, He could not change (3:6) until the nation turned to Him and tithed (Nu. 18:21; Lev. 27:30) what He had given to them (Mal. 3:8f.).

c. When they turned to God, He would turn to them, and all would see how His blessings filled the land to overflowing (vv. 10b-12).

6. "I will distinguish between the righteous and the wicked" (3:13-4:3 [H 3:13-21]).

a. The prosperity of the wicked, who do not serve God, caused some to wonder about the value of serving God (3:13-15), but those who truly feared God encouraged one another with His promises (v. 16).

b. God will remember their righteousness and treat them as persons very special and dearly loved (vv. 17f.).

c. On the day of judgment, He will distinguish the wicked from the righteous (v. 18);

d. The wicked will be destroyed, but the righteous ones who fear God will enjoy His blessings forever (4:1-3).

7. The final three verses (4:4-6 [H 3:22-24]) summarize the book and present two challenges.

a. 1st encourages the people to follow God’s word through Moses (4:4)

b. 2nd reminds them to put their lives in order before the appearing of Elijah on the great day of the Lord.

B. Composition of the Prophecy:

1. Date.

a. The references to sacrifice (1:7-14) and the doors (v. 10) point to a period of Jewish history when the temple was standing.
The reference to the governor in v.8 (Hag. 1:1; Neh. 5:4; 12:26) indicates that Malachi lived in the Persian period after the completion of the second temple in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:14f.).

The laxity with which the priest fulfilled his duties (Mal. 1:8-13) and the failure of the people to pay their tithe (3:8-10) suggest a date when religious fervor had begun to wane, well after 515 BC Ezra and Nehemiah also faced the problems of tithing (Neh. 10:32-39 (MT 33-40); 13:10-13), mixed marriages (Mal. 2:10ff.; Ezra 9:1ff.; Neh 13) and oppression of the poor (Mal 3:5; Neh. 5:1-5).

The exact relationship of Ezra and Nehemiah to Malachi is not given in the text. Scholars argue three main possibilities.

b. Before Ezra — The majority of scholars have placed Malachi Ca. 460 B.C., before the time of Ezra — According to this view:

(1) Malachi must be before Ezra and Nehemiah, since Malachi never mentioned their work in his book

(2) Malachi’s tithing (Deut 14:22-29) and offering laws (Deut 15:1; 17:1) and use of Levites and priests as synonyms (Deut 21:5) indicate that he relied on Deuteronomy

c. Around the Time of Nehemiah’s Second Visit to Jerusalem: — evidence for this view:

(1) The identical abuses in Nehemiah and Malachi

(a) Tithes in Mal 3:8-10 and Neh 13:10-14
(b) Mixed marriages in Mal 2:11 and Neh 13:23
(c) Social ills in Mal 3:5 and Neh. 5:1-13

(2) Both Malachi and Nehemiah presuppose that the law is in force — thus after Ezra
(3) The need for temple funds does not fit the period of Ezra when the cost of the temple was met from the royal treasury (Ezra 6:15-17, 20-24).

d. **Conclusions** — a date around the second visit of Nehemiah is most likely.

(1) The absence of any reference to Malachi in Ezra or Nehemiah or to Ezra and Nehemiah in Malachi cannot determine the order of the books.

(2) An early date for Malachi cannot be based on his use of Deuteronomy

(3) A date Ca. 420 B.C. is preferable, since it is far enough away from Nehemiah’s reform to explain the failure of the two to mention one another.

(a) A considerable amount of time between Malachi and Nehemiah allows one to take Nehemiah’s reform seriously and provides time for its effects to have worn thin.

(b) There is also a distinction between the marriage problems in Neh 13 and Mal, 2:10-16.

(c) “I hate divorce” (Mal. 2:16) addresses a later problem that developed among Israelite couples because Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s permission to divorce foreign women was later extended to all marriages.

(d) The problem of the tithe in Malachi is also later than Nehemiah, since in Neh 13:4-9 Tobiah prevented the bringing of the tithes, thus causing the Levites to forsake the temple and go to work (vv. 10-14), but in Malachi the Levites were back teaching and sacrificing in the temple (1:6-2:9), and famine was the reason that the “full tithe” was not brought (2:11).
2. **Structure and Style:**

   a. The dialogue style of Malachi determines the structure within the paragraphs.

   b. Each paragraph is structured around

      (1) An initial statement
      (2) An objection to the statement
      (3) A detailed substantiation of the statement that ends with a promise, threat, or encouragement.

   c. The style of the book resembles “prophetic disputations” and the dialogue style of Haggai.

      (1) These short and direct challenges put in the mouth of the people are rhetorical literary devices used to focus attention on underlying theological issues that motivate behavior.

      (2) The book is prose with a limited use of figurative language.

C. **Theological Significance.**

1. Malachi was not a shallow legalistic scribe with no prophetic insight.

   a. The book lacks any reference to widespread discouragement among the people because the glories of the messianic age had not come.

   b. Two very common problems faced the community: economic depression (3:10f.), and a lack of sound theological teaching (2:6-8).

   c. Since the people had no theological foundation, the economic conditions led to a misunderstanding of God’s character and thus to a perversion of morality and worship.

   d. Malachi provided the instructions they needed by emphasizing the lordship of God. God is like a father and master (1:6), a great king
(v. 16) and creator (2:10, 15), who loves those who fear and serve Him and judges the wicked (3:17).

e. Because the priests failed to instruct the nation, the basis for morality, worship, and service did not exist, and many people did not fear or honor God.

f. God assured the people of His blessings on those who returned to Him, reminded them of His love, and promised that the “coming one,” who would be preceded by Elijah, would refine the nation through judgment.

2. 4:5. "I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes," is quoted in the NT.

a. It is quoted in the announcement by "an angel of the Lord" (ἀγγέλος κυρίου, angelos kuriou) who states that the child born of Elizabeth and Zechariah will come "With the spirit and power of Elijah," Luke 1:11, 17

b. Jesus later identified John the Baptist as this Elijah, Matt 11:10, 14; Mk 9:11-13).