



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

---

**Volume 20 Issue 33**

**August 15, 2021**

## Introduction to Malachi

Malachi 1:1 & Select

Am I the only one or do you also identify with Paul's statement?

1 Corinthians 1:26: "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble."

When God saved me, there was no question: I was a nobody in the world's eyes. And today, I'm still a nobody... even in the context of the Kingdom of God. In fact, if there is anything that stands out about me — in my mind — is that there is nothing that

stands out about me. I struggle when it comes to these things:

- Obedience.
- Diligent service.
- Practical faith.
- Trusting God in the crucible.
- Being moved by the Lord rather than man.
- Loving God NOT for what I get, BUT for who He is!

And that is why I am so thankful for the book of Malachi. It was written between two revelational “mountain top” periods (between the era of the Theocracy and the First Advent of Christ). As such, it was given to a people living, as are we<sup>1</sup>, at a time where the miraculous and exciting was gone. Today was the same as yesterday and tomorrow will be the same as today. Joyce Baldwin put it this way:

Malachi’s prophecy is particularly relevant to the many waiting periods in human history and in the lives of individuals. He enables us to see the strains and temptations of such times, the imperceptible abrasion of faith that ends in cynicism because it has lost touch with the living God. Even more important he shows the way back to a genuine, enduring faith in the God who does not change (Malachi 3:6), who invites men to return to him (3:7), and never forgets those who respond (3:16). (Baldwin, 1972, pp. 225-226)

### The Background: The Prophet, Date, and Religious Setting, Malachi 1:1; Select.

Malachi 1:1, “The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.”

This prophecy starts with what now is familiar to us, “the oracle/burden of the word of the Lord.” Recall, the word for “oracle” is the word in the Hebrew for “burden.” From this we see that the message of God’s word brings with it a burden to any and all to whom it comes. For the inspired writer of Scripture, “the burden” was to proclaim it boldly and accurately regardless of the consequences. Recall the struggle Samuel had as a young boy when God gave him the message of the downfall of Eli’s household?

=1 Samuel 3:15: after Samuel received the vision of the Lord, we read, “So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.”

And such was the case for so many of God’s prophets.

For us, “the burden” in receiving the word of God is in understanding it and submitting to it regardless of the consequences! Well, it was that “burden” God gave a prophet by the name of “Malachi” (מְלָאכִי [Malaki]).

There is much debate as to whether or not “Malachi” was a name or a title. The word comes from the Hebrew, מַלְאָכִי (*malak*), which refers to “a messenger.”<sup>2</sup> One of the main reasons for believing that Malachi is NOT a name is that in no other place in the Bible is “Malachi” the name of an individual. Yet, such is the case for Habakkuk and JoNahum. That having been said, you can do the study on your own if you are interested.<sup>3</sup> I side with the traditional view which holds that “Malachi” was the name of a prophet who received a message from the Lord in 444 BC.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking of the dating of this book, there is also much debate as to when this prophecy was given. All agree it was written in the fifth century BC. BUT was it early, middle, or late in the century? The answer revolves around the order one places upon the returns of Ezra and Nehemiah to Palestine.<sup>5</sup> I believe Malachi wrote soon after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, I hold to the date of 444 BC. That being said, let me give you the political-religious setting of this book.

## Politically

We pick the story up in 539 BC when “Cyrus the Great” conquered the Babylonian nation establishing the next great nation to rule the Near East, Persia. Recall that the last emperor of Babylon (Nabonidus) most likely was insane which explains why he moved the capital city of Babylon to the Oasis of Teima in the Arabian desert. There he moved many of the primary gods of Babylon from the capital city to Teima! This alienated many as it was taken NOT ONLY as an abandonment of the nation, BUT ALSO of its religion — which is why when Cyrus conquered Babylon, he played the role of a religious liberator.<sup>6</sup> George Klein describes it this way:

Cyrus sought to promote the religious traditions of each nation, granting Persian funds and posturing himself as the most devoted follower of each and every deity. Cyrus wished that the conquered peoples would view him [in contrast to Nabonidus] as a faithful worshipper of their national deities... This policy thus allowed diverse peoples under Persian control to exercise a significant measure of self governance as well as to retain their cultural and religious identity. (Klein, 2007, p. 36)

And so, in 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree for God’s people to return to Palestine and rebuild their temple.<sup>7</sup> The next year, 42,360 Jews returned, but they were overwhelmed by the difficulties before them. They broke off rebuilding the temple almost as soon as they had begun, and instead focused on their personal well-being.

Such was the case until 520 BC when God raised up Haggai and Zechariah whom the Lord used to encourage His people unto faithfulness. The temple would be rebuilt in 516 BC.

From 516 BC on there is relative silence on the part of history when it comes to God's people. Yet much was going on in Persia.

- Following the death of Cyrus in 530 BC, Darius became King of Babylon. It was under him that the Jews completed the temple in 516. He died 486 BC.
- His son, Xerxes (the Old Testament Ahasuerus) ascended to the throne — yes, this is the King who married Esther! Now as was typical in that day when a new king ascended, various and sundry lands took advantage of the weakened nation and so rebelled. Such was the case of Egypt. Yet Xerxes quelled the rebellion in less than two years. This made Xerxes think he was a world conqueror and so he turned his focus to Greece. And yes, this is that era where we read of Thermopylae (480 BC) where 300 Spartans and a handful of other Greeks held off the Persian attack against Greece long enough to allow the City States of Greece to unite and eventually destroy the Persian Naval fleet in The Battle of Salamis (480 BC).
- Licking his wounds, Xerxes returned to Persia leaving a trusted general, Mardonius, in command of the Persian troops in Greece. Yet Greece proved to be too strong a foe and the Persian army under Mardonius was crushed at Mycale in 479 BC. Xerxes spent the remainder of his reign indulging the flesh whereupon he died in 465 BC.
- His son, Artaxerxes I, became ruler of Persia and so the Persian king when Malachi was written. Early in his regency Artaxerxes bribed Sparta to go to war with Athens which occurred. This initially served to lessen the threat that Greece posed to Persia... yet not for long. For much of his regency, Artaxerxes faced political unrest caused by Greece and Egypt- a headache he was all too willing to be without! It was ALSO during this time we read of the political unrest described in Ezra and Nehemiah.

With this, consider with me The Religious/Cultural Setting of Malachi...

### Religiously/Culturally

From 516-458 BC we know very little of what was going on religiously amongst God's people in Palestine. The one thing that stands out is the story of Esther which occurred in 483 BC (Esther became queen in 479 BC).

Yet based on the religious environment and struggles of God's people in Ezra and Nehemiah, we know that this era was incredibly difficult for those in Palestine! I'll give you an example. In Ezekiel (written in 593 BC in exile) the prophet described the departing of the glory of God from the temple (Ezekiel 8-11). Yet, later in the prophecy, he gave a vision of God's return.

Ezekiel 43:4-5, “And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.”

We looked at this passage when we studied Ezekiel and saw that it was NOT given in reference to a literal temple. Yet understandably, God’s people took this as a promise that someday God would inhabit the physical temple if it were rebuilt!

Well guess what? The temple was rebuilt BUT God’s glory did NOT fill the temple like it did in 2 Chronicles 7! Talk about disappointing!

In fact, far from God’s glory coming to the temple, during this time God’s people in Palestine lived in constant poverty, with internal and external threats, affliction, famine, and so much more.<sup>8,9</sup> The impact that this had on their fervor and passion for the Lord was massive! The people whom Malachi served had become bored with God, lackadaisical in their walk, and compromised in their service. Baldwin wrote:

Whereas most of the prophets lived and prophesied in days of change and political upheaval, Malachi and his contemporaries were living in an uneventful waiting period, when God seemed to have forgotten his people enduring poverty and foreign domination in the little province of Judah. Zerubbabel and Joshua, whom Haggai and Zechariah had indicated as God’s chosen men for the new age, had died. True the temple had been completed, but nothing momentous had occurred to indicate that God’s presence had returned to fill it with glory, as Ezekiel had indicated would happen (Ezek. 43:4). The day of miracles had passed with Elijah and Elisha. The round of religious duties continued to be carried on, but without enthusiasm. Where was the God of their fathers? Did it really matter whether one served him or not? (Baldwin, 1972, p. 225)

This is THE ISSUE behind everything Malachi wrote in this prophecy! And that brings us to 458 BC which was the Second Return of God’s People to Palestine.

Ezra is a key player here. He was born in Persia and raised as to be a scribe and priest. God’s grace rested strongly on him such that he was a servant clearly blessed by the Lord!

So in time, Ezra approached Artaxerxes with the request to go to Jerusalem with the full support of the Persian crown. The Persian King was all too willing to let him go, no doubt in the hopes that Ezra’s presence and work there would quell much of the conflict that had arisen in Judah during this time.<sup>10</sup> Eugene Merrill wrote:

Ezra received permission from Artaxerxes I to lead an exilic band back to Jerusalem. The Persian king authorized him to do virtually whatever he desired in the trans-

Euphratean provinces, including Judah... Artaxerxes viewed a loyal Judean province as an important asset for his anticipated disciplinary action against Egypt. And what better way to ensure Judean loyalty than to allow Ezra, no doubt a highly popular and powerful Jewish leader, to reestablish Jewish life and culture in that little land that was so crucial to Persian success? (Merrill, 2008, pp. 506-507)

And so, Ezra left for Jerusalem with the full support and resources of Persia. Yet upon his entrance into Jerusalem, things couldn't have been worse! As we just saw, life in Jerusalem had degraded into moral and spiritual compromise! One of the first things Ezra had to address was the question of intermarriage.

Ezra 9:1-2, "Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy [nation] has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

Ezra couldn't believe it! His first response was deep mourning and prayer (cf. Ezra 9:3-4). As a result, Ezra held a Covenant Renewal service involving repentance and mourning which *on the surface* seemed to have moved the people of God.

Ezra 10:1-4, "Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women, and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly. And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God, and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.'"

And that's exactly what they did! They renewed their Covenant Commitment to God! And this led to more services and instruction on what the people of God were to do — services where the people made incredible promises of devotion to the Lord.

Ezra 10:10-12, "Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. Now, therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.' Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, 'That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do.'"

All this sounds wonderful, until you realize that we do NOT read that the people of God at this time followed through with their commitment and promises of devotion- which no doubt is why later when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem the people of God NOT ONLY had foreign wives, BUT they were allowing pagan people to live on the temple mount! And so, in spite of Ezra's presence and ministry, God's people continued to rush headlong into sin! His work did NOT curb their sinful perspective and practices!

That brings us to 445 BC and the Third and Final Return of the People of God to Jerusalem. Politically, things in the west continued to weigh heavily on Artaxerxes I. Once again, Egypt was in rebellion and the political situation in Palestine continued to need attention.<sup>11</sup> Eugene Merrill wrote:

One may assume that conditions throughout Syro-Palestine were chaotic after 449 and that there was desperate need for strong leadership there. Particularly hard hit was Judah, for not only must it have suffered the ravages of rebellion and counterrebellion, but it was constantly under attack, verbally if not physically, from the Samaritans and their allies. (Merrill, 2008, p. 508)

About this time, Artaxerxes I's Jewish "Cup Bearer" — one of his most trusted men as he was charged with the King's protection against poisoning- received a visit from a family member who had just come from Palestine.

Nehemiah 1:1-3, "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah [Nehemiah was Artaxerxes 'cup bearer']. Now it happened in the month Chisleu, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. And they said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.'"

This profoundly affected Nehemiah so much that it negatively impacted the service he gave to Artaxerxes I. In fact, the king essentially asked, "Why the sad face, Nehemiah?" (cf. Nehemiah 2:1-2) Nehemiah responded by sharing the news he had received about his homeland.

Nehemiah 2:4-5, "Then the king said to me, 'What would you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, 'If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"

Politically this came at the perfect time on account of the problems in Judah! Who better to send than his trusted friend/advisor, Nehemiah?

And so, in 445 BC Nehemiah came to Jerusalem where he found it in horrible condition (Ezra's ministry had little affect)! Religiously, God's people had given up! Morally, God's people lived compromised lives! And politically, the local Persian governors presented a united front of opposition to any attempt on the part of God's people to rebuild the city.

- Sanballat was the Persian governor of Syria/Samaria.
- Tobiah was the Persian governor charged with overseeing the Ammonites.
- Geshem was the Persian governor assigned to keep peace over an Arabian tribe that had settled south of Palestine.

Each of these men would have interpreted Nehemiah as a pro-Persian governor and so a threat to their autonomy!

Yet Nehemiah was NOT to be detoured! Fifty-two days into his governorship, the city walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt!! Yet that was only the beginning. After this, Nehemiah set about to address the compromised state of both the religion and culture of Judaism.

- He first addressed the usury that was going on amongst God's people in which Jews were enslaving fellow Jews, Nehemiah 5:1-5.
- He then addressed the needs of the worship of God's people, Nehemiah 7:1.
- Because of the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, no one wanted to live there (Nehemiah 7:4). Accordingly, Nehemiah organized and encouraged the people of God to build private houses in the city, Nehemiah 7:5ff.
- He reinstated the autumn festivals, Nehemiah 7:73-8:3.
- He led God's people in Covenant Renewal, Nehemiah 9:1ff!

Following this, he returned to Susa (Nehemiah 13:6). While he was gone, Tobiah moved into a house on the temple mount (Nehemiah 13:7)! And if that wasn't bad enough<sup>12</sup>, upon Nehemiah's return, he found that:

- Support for the Levites had been neglected (Nehemiah 13:10-14).
- The Sabbath was being violated (Nehemiah 13:15-22).
- And God's people once again were intermarrying with Gentiles (Nehemiah 13:23-31)!

All of this serves as the background of Malachi whose ministry occurred in and around 444 BC in which the prophet addressed the moral, spiritual, and religious compromise so typical of a disillusioned people of God!<sup>13</sup> With the time we have left, consider with me an important calling given to God's people in this book.

### [An Important Calling: "My Messenger," Malachi 3:1.](#)

Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way



before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the Lord of hosts."

The word used for "My messenger" is one and the same as the name of the prophet who penned this book, מְלָאכִי (*Malaki*)!

We know that this verse ultimately refers to John the Baptist (which we'll talk about when we get here in our study). However, I want you to note that the usage here is broad, and so could reference anyone who bears the word of God and so brings the word of God to others. That is "our burden" when it comes to the word of God! And so, we have a description of what you and I are privileged to be to one another and the world in which we live, "God's messenger!" In the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 61:1-3, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in* Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

Though a Messianic reference, is this NOT a call that rests on our lives as well?! It is to bring the glorious message/word of God to the brokenhearted, to those bound by sin, to those heavy laden with grief.

Isaiah 52:7, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

This description of "the Malachi of God" is found throughout Scripture (Isaiah 40:9; 61:1; Nahum 1:15; Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15)!

And so, to say that Malachi 3:1 ultimately references John the Baptist and leave it at that is to miss a glorious calling which I hope we all walk away with in our study of this book. If you are in Christ, then you are one of the many messengers that He has sent into this world.

In this regard, according to the text what is our job as "a messenger"? It is NOT to save people, it is NOT to share a full-orbed presentation of the gospel, it is NOT even to lead non-believers to Christ!<sup>14</sup> RATHER, look at the text, it is to, "...clear the way before Me..."

When I was in Seminary, I received this teaching from a professor known for his evangelistic fervor. He introduced us to the concept of Pre-Evangelism — which here is referred to as, “clearing the way before Christ”! That’s our call! It is to engage people NOT in the hopes of saving them, BUT simply to prepare the way of the Lord that God might deliver them from their sin.

1 Corinthians 3:5-6:, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.”

Christian, may God give us the grace to be faithful to this glorious calling: Preparing the way for the Lord!

## References

- Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai Zechariah Malachi (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press.
- Boda, M. J. (2016). *The Book of Zechariah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT))*. Grandrapids: Eerdmans.
- Klein, G. (2007). *Zechariah: New American Commentary [NAC]*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman.
- Merrill, E. H. (2008). *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Richard A. Taylor, E. R. (2004). *Haggai & Malachi: New American Commentary [NAC]*. Nashville: B & H Books.
- Verhoef, P. A. (1987). *The Books of Haggai and Malachi (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of Malachi, “It was crafted to speak to the hearts of a troubled people whose circumstances of financial insecurity, religious skepticism, and personal disappointments are similar to those God’s people often experience or encounter today.” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, p. 203)

<sup>2</sup> The ending makes the word possessive, “My messenger.”

<sup>3</sup> “Each book of the Old Testament has its own peculiar problems with matters of introduction. The most obvious problem with Malachi is undoubtedly the question whether the name *Malachi* should be regarded as a proper name or as a title. The main arguments against the assumption that Malachi is to be regarded as a proper name are the following: The similarity in the titles of Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; and Malachi 1:1 points to a secondary origin, and to the fact that these prophecies were originally handed down anonymously. The name *Malachi* was supposedly taken from 3:1 and has been introduced in the superscription as a Stichwort, indicating the author of the book. In its present form the word *Malachi* means ‘my messenger,’ and according to most scholars this surely would not have been a suitable name to give to any child. It is also significant that the name appears nowhere else in the OT and that later history apparently knows nothing of a person by that name. The translation of both the LXX and the Targum suggests the idea that *Malachi* was not regarded as a proper name. The Targum added

to the words 'by Malachi' the note: 'whose name is called Ezra the scribe.' The LXX translated the same phrase "by the hand of his angel [or messenger]." This tradition has been further established by a number of church fathers who regarded the term *malachi* as a mere appellative or title adopted by the prophet. ¶ As an anonymous writer the person of 'Malachi' has been variously identified. According to some Jewish scholars and church fathers he indeed was an angel who appeared in human form. According to others he was a historical figure, alternatively identified with Ezra, Haggai, Mordecai, or a certain Joshua. Many modern scholars agree that the book of Malachi was originally anonymous. The words 'by the hand of Malachi' were added by an editor in order to distinguish this prophecy from the so-called anonymous prophecies of Zechariah 9–11 and 12–14 and to obtain the desired number of twelve Minor Prophets. ¶ These and similar arguments against *Malachi* being a proper name are indeed legitimate but not conclusive. The argument based upon the anonymity of Zechariah 9–11; 12–14; and Malachi is merely a hypothesis. According to Baldwin, et al., Zechariah 9–14 are an integral part of the book and not anonymous. The argument of anonymity therefore falls to the ground. The same applies to the consideration that 'malachi' was an editor's title borrowed from 3:1. If so, the editor was not very well informed, for the rest of the sentence in Malachi 1:1 suggests the third person, and the borrowed word meaning 'my messenger' does not suit the context. The correct alteration 'his messenger' was made by the translators of the LXX, but this fact merely serves to reinforce the originality of the MT, being in this context the more difficult reading! ¶ We agree that 'my messenger' is not a suitable name to give to a child, but it might be appropriate if we may assume the meaning 'messenger of the Lord.' It is also true that the name Malachi is not found elsewhere in the OT or in later Jewish literature, but this applies also to Jonah and Habakkuk. The argument that the words 'by the hand of Malachi' were added to distinguish this prophecy from the 'anonymous' prophecies of Zechariah 9–11 and 12–14 and to obtain the desired number of twelve Minor Prophets is unacceptable, because the number of the Minor Prophets would then have been fourteen instead of twelve! ¶ There are indeed valid reasons to regard Malachi as the proper name of a prophet. The main considerations are: The analogy of the titles of other prophetic books in which reference is made to the author. The fact that when the expression *beyad* is used to indicate the human instrument of God's revelation it is normally followed by a proper name. The tradition of the word as a proper name is really very old, as is evident from the rendering of the Peshitta, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Vulgate. 2 Esdras, dating from the second century A.D., lists the twelve Minor Prophets, naming as the last three books Aggaeus, Secharias, and Malachias, with the remark concerning Malachi: 'qui et angelus Domini vocatus est' ('who is also called the angel [messenger] of the Lord'). 'Malachi' is thus regarded as a proper name. The Greek form, 'Malachias,' appears also in the superscription of the book in the LXX. Hence the LXX's rendering, 'his messenger,' may be only a different form of the Hebrew word, *malkî yāhû*, in the sense of 'messenger of the Lord.' The *yod* is taken as a *yod compaginis*, as is the case in 'abdi' (1 Chr. 6:44), 'abdi'el (1 Chr. 5:15; cf. 'abde'el, Jer. 36:26), and buqqi' (Num. 34:22; Ezra 7:14) compared with buqqiyāhû (1 Chr. 25:4, 13). ¶ In the absence of compelling arguments to the contrary it is logical to accept that the prophet was called Malachi. This conclusion of Baldwin is endorsed by a number of scholars. According to G. A. Smith 'it is true that neither in form nor in meaning is there any insuperable obstacle to our understanding *mal'akhi* as the name of a person.' Any one of the meanings 'my angel,' 'my messenger,' or 'angelic' could have been a natural name for a Jewish child and especially for a prophet, according to Smith." (Verhoef, 1987, pp. 154-156)

<sup>4</sup> "Evidence from the Targum shows that the Aramaic translators understood Malachi as a name or title of Ezra the Scribe, a viewpoint adopted by Jerome and by Rabbi Rashi (1040–1105). Calvin was inclined to think that Malachi was Ezra's surname. While there is no evidence that Malachi is to be identified with Ezra the tradition is strong that Malachi is a personal name, and in the absence of compelling arguments to the contrary it is logical to accept that the prophet was called Malachi." (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, TOTC, p. 227)

<sup>5</sup> "The majority of scholars favor a date prior to the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. Of these, the ones who follow the traditional date of 458 B.C. for Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem date Malachi about 460 or earlier. Hill and Merrill, for example, date Malachi fairly early in that period, and Stuart and Dumbrell place it just prior to Ezra's arrival.<sup>11</sup> Those who place Ezra's work after Nehemiah's, in about 428 or 398 B.C., typically date Malachi about 450 B.C., not long before

Nehemiah's arrival in 445. Some date Malachi's work during the time of Ezra but before Nehemiah.<sup>14</sup> Several scholars associate Malachi's ministry with Nehemiah, either during his first term as governor (445–433 B.C.), during or just before Nehemiah's second term as governor (Neh 13:6–7), or perhaps after his governorship." (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, pp. 205-206)

<sup>6</sup> cf. (Boda, 2016, p. 9)

<sup>7</sup> "According to Ezra 1:2–4; 6:2–5, in the first year after his conquest of Babylon, Cyrus issued a similar decree regarding the Jews, allowing them to return to their homeland with items from their temple looted by Nebuchadnezzar and to rebuild their sanctuary with a government subsidy. This would have helped to consolidate the western frontier of his newly acquired kingdom against Egypt and the Arab tribes. It is also possible that he wished to reward Jewish aid in his takeover of Babylon. As in the case of the Cyrus Cylinder, which is written in traditional Mesopotamian form and from the point of view of a Mesopotamian ruler, the decree in Ezra 1:2–4 is written almost as if Cyrus were a Jew. This would indicate that it was actually written by Jews, some of whom Cyrus may have even known personally." (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, pp. 210-211)

<sup>8</sup> "Berquist argues that although Darius's policy toward the provinces 'approached a laissez-faire posture, ... encouraging local religion, and at times financing local altar services,' when Xerxes became king in 485 B.C., things changed dramatically. Support for local religion ceased, and 'tax structures throughout the empire shifted to favor Persians and to increase the taxation upon all other ethnic and national groups.' Huge financial resources were needed to support building projects as well as military ventures in the west. 'Xerxes hedged the decline of the ethnic Persian economy by depleting the resources of the provinces.' This situation would have placed a severe strain not only on the economy of Judah but also on the temple. ¶ Biblical evidence confirms that whoever was administrating Judah in that period, at least toward the end of the first half century, they were either inept or corrupt or both. There was severe poverty due to high taxes (Neh 5:4, 15) and inflation caused by Persian economic policies and famine (Neh 5:3), resulting in confiscation of property (Neh 5:5, 11) and debt slavery on a large scale (Neh 5:5, 8). Interest rates had risen from about 20 percent under Cyrus and Cambyses to 40–50 percent by the end of the fifth century, which may have been a contributing factor to the inflation. But Nehemiah seems to put much of the blame on 'former governors' who, their income obtained by taxation, greedily 'burdened the people' and allowed their subordinates to 'lord it over them' (Nehemiah 5:14–15)." (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, pp. 214-215)

<sup>9</sup> "In a certain sense the coming of Ezra coincided with the disturbances caused by the war between the Persians and Egyptians. According to some scholars this war was one of the causes of the ultimate failure of Ezra's initial reform (Reinke, Grosheide). Thus when Nehemiah appeared on the scene some years later, the colony was in a state of deep decline. The walls of Jerusalem were still further destroyed, presumably by the Egyptians and Persians, and everywhere conditions were bad. The exorbitant profits of the rich, together with the compulsory contributions to the Persians for the waging of their wars, caused many to sink into poverty, to mortgage their property, and to give their sons and daughters into slavery." (Verhoef, 1987, pp. 160-161)

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Merrill wrote, "Not only was his return permitted by the Persian king, but Artaxerxes issued a decree... to the effect that whatever silver and gold Ezra received from the king, Babylonian sources, and Jews elsewhere should be taken back to Jerusalem and used for the purchase of sacrificial animals for the temple of Yahweh. It that was not enough, more could be requested from the royal treasury. If there was a surplus of funds, it could be used in any way Ezra and his people wished. Finally, Ezra was authorized to appoint public officials throughout the trans-Euphratean satrapy." (Merrill, 2008, p. 502)

<sup>11</sup> "Persia was having to deal then with a revolt in Egypt inspired by the Athenians, who captured Memphis in 459 B.C. O. Margalith argues that the Palestine-Phoenician coast came then into Greek control, possibly led by the city of Dor, a member of the Attic-Delic League and listed in the Tribute Lists in 454 B.C. During the years 460 to 454 it was especially to the advantage of Persia to have strong support from Judah, hence the mission of Ezra. After the Greeks were driven from Egypt in 454 B.C., however, and the peace of Callias was obtained in 449, Margalith suggests, 'Obviously Jerusalem had ceased to be of any political or military interest to the king.' Therefore, when Artaxerxes heard the accusations of revolt from his

officials in Palestine (Ezra 4:9–16), he ordered the reconstruction of Jerusalem to be stopped (Ezra 4:17–22). Hence, in 445 B.C. Nehemiah learned of the distress there. The subsequent mission of Nehemiah to continue the very work Artaxerxes had just halted (Neh 2:7–8) is perhaps the result of chaotic conditions in Abar Nahara caused by the revolt of Megabyzus the satrap in 448.” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, pp. 216-217)

<sup>12</sup> “After a period of twelve years, in which time Nehemiah performed his comprehensive reform, he again returned to Persia (Nehemiah 12:44–47; 13:6). ¶ On his second visit to Palestine Nehemiah found that many of the abuses which he had abolished during his first visit were again being practiced by the people (Nehemiah 13:6–31). The sabbath was desecrated (13:15–22). Contrary to the stipulations of Deuteronomy 23:3–7, many Ammonites and Moabites were accommodated into the community life of the covenant people. The priest Eliashib fitted out a room for his relative, the Ammonite Tobiah (Nehemiah 2:10), in the courts of the house of God (13:7–9). Tyrian merchants established themselves in Jerusalem and to their hearts’ content sold their wares to the children of Judah on the sabbath (13:16). Fraternization with the heathen fellow citizens developed into mixed marriages on a large scale (13:23–29). The children born from those marriages could not even speak the Judean language (13:24).” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 161)

<sup>13</sup> “In this general context Malachi was called to fulfill his prophetic ministry. With the exception of the desecration of the sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15–22), he rebuked all the abuses mentioned in Nehemiah 13:6–31.” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 161)

<sup>14</sup> Many times, we struggle with evangelism because we think it involves so much... apologetics, knowing the Bible well enough to give a reasoned defense of the faith, and so much more. Yet that is not the call here!