

MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew word Malachi literally means, “My messenger.” It is not entirely clear from the context of the book if this was to be taken as a title or the name of a prophet.

Many of the prophets give an exact dating of their prophecies. Malachi does not. We can see, however, that the concerns raised by Malachi are those which were issues during the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah make reference to Malachi even though Malachi was likely a contemporary with them. That is normally taken as an indication that Malachi came a bit after them.

That tells us a little of the setting for this book.

- After the Babylonian Captivity
- Temple had been rebuilt
- Walls of Jerusalem had been restored
- People are back in the land.

The fact that all of these events had taken place should have made Malachi a very positive and a very upbeat book. It isn't. There are some real problems with which this book deals. Let's look at them.

The book of Malachi can be outlined in two major points:

1. God's love for Israel and her unfaithful response (1-2)
2. The Day of the Lord and the purging of Israel (3-4)

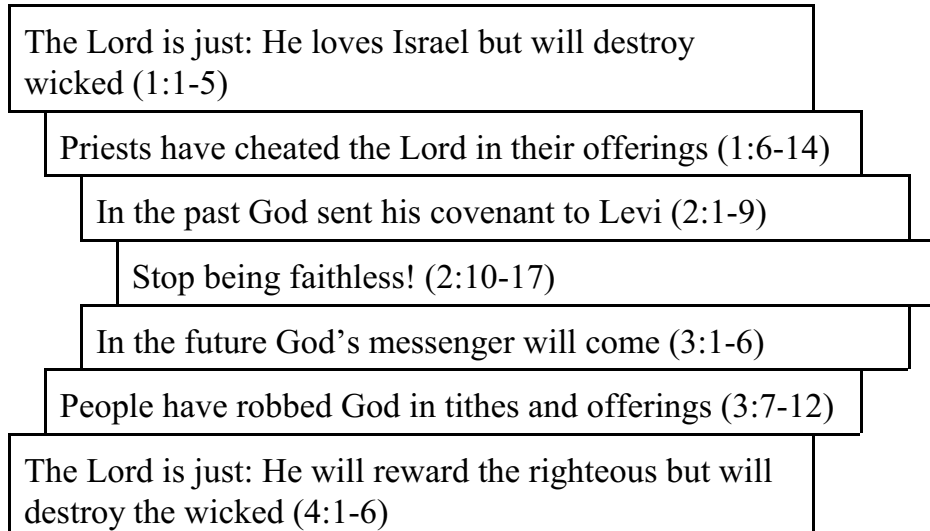
The book is made up of a series of statements and corresponding questions between God and the people of Israel.

MALACHI

1:1	God says: “I have loved you”	People answer: “How have you loved us?”	God has blessed Israel above other nations
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1:6	God says: “If I am a father, where is my honor?”	People answer: “How have we despised your name?”	The people have not offered their best to the Lord
2:10	People ask: “If we are brothers, why do we deal treacherously with one another?”		The people have defrauded one another, especially in the area of divorce
2:17	God says: “You have wearied the Lord with your words”	People answer: “How have we wearied Him?”	The people have asked for justice, but have not acted justly.
3:1	Promise of a Coming Messenger.		
3:6	God says: “Return to Me and I will return to you”	People answer: “How shall we return?”	The people are to return to the Lord.
3:8	God says: “You have robbed me”	People answer: “How have we robbed you?”	The people are to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse
3:13	God says: “Your words have been arrogant against Me”	People answer: “What have we spoken against you?”	They have taken the attitude that it is vain to serve the Lord
3:16	Epilogue: Promise of Coming Judgment and Restoration		

A closer examination of the book reveals that it is chiastic in design.



GOD'S UNDESERVED LOVE FOR ISRAEL

"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How hast Thou loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; ³ but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation, and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." (Malachi 1:2-3).

The Lord illustrates His love for Israel by contrasting it with His treatment of Esau, the brother of Israel. Here were two brothers. They were from the same mother and the same father. They were twins. Yet the Lord showed His love to one and not to the other.

It is not that Jacob was a better man than Esau. Jacob was actually something of a scoundrel. He was a cheat and a trickster. His name literally meant "heel-grabber" and translated to something akin to our colloquial phrase when we describe one who is pulling my leg.

Jacob was shown the favor of God, not because he earned or deserved that favor, but merely as a manifestation of the unmerited grace of God.

God says, "I loved you when you were unlovable. You therefore ought to respond in gratitude and thanksgiving."

There is a lesson here about the grace of God. Grace properly understood does not lead to licentious living. A true understanding and application of God's grace is a motivation for godly living.

THE PROBLEM OF MEDIOCRITY

6 *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, "How have we despised Thy name?"*

7 *You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, "How have we defiled Thee?" In that you say, "The table of the LORD is to be despised."*

8 *"But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.*

9 *"But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you*

kindly?” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:6-9).

The Lord brings forth a charge against His people. It is a charge of mediocrity. They are coming to the Lord with their offerings, but they use only the lame and the sick for those offerings.

They are like the rancher who said, “I have a herd of cattle and I’ve decided to donate one to the Lord’s work this Sunday.” But that Saturday evening, one of the cows kicked through the fence, got out of the pasture and was hit and killed by a passing truck. When the rancher heard of it, he shook his head and muttered, “It sure is a shame that the Lord’s cow was killed!”

C.S. Lewis pointed out that the worship of the Lord is and the understanding of His truths are either the most important endeavor to which the human soul can aspire or else it is completely worthless. The only thing it cannot be is mildly important.

If your worship is mediocre, there is a corresponding problem with your faith. You are like the one the James describes who is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Steve Brown used to be the Senior Pastor of Key Biscayne Presbyterian Church. He tells of what happened when it was reported that President Richard Nixon was going to show up in the worship service. Everyone showed up to church that Sunday and the Sanctuary was packed. When it became apparent that Nixon wasn’t going to show up, some of the people started to leave. Brown quipped, “The president may not be here, but there is someone here who is a lot more important and a lot more powerful.”

What would be your reaction if you found out that the President of the United States was coming to dinner? The red carpet would be rolled out. The best china would be brought out to the table. No expense would be too great.

How does your worship match up to such a standard?

THE PROBLEM OF LEADERSHIP

“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 2:7-8).

One of the problems of the people was a corresponding problem in the leadership. There is a principle here -- as goes the leadership, so also will go the people.

That is why our denomination takes such great care and pains to qualify and train those whom it ordains into positions of leadership.

The priest in that day and the pastor today has a high and a holy calling. It is given in verse 7 -- *he is the messenger [the Malachi] of the LORD of hosts.*

You need to know this. You need to know this so that you can keep your leaders accountable. If you catch one of us teaching our own opinions rather than the word of the Lord, then you call us on the carpet.

- **Encourage** your pastor as he speaks to you the word of the Lord. God is speaking through him to you.
- Support your pastor in **prayer** that the Lord use him as a faithful vessel to minister to you the words of life.
- Study to **listen** to the preaching of your pastor. Be an active listener and focus your mind and heart upon his preaching to you.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE

"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." (Malachi 2:16).

To understand the issue of divorce and how it had come about, we have to go back to the book of Ezra to see the first two migrations back to the land. Because of the long, hard journey, there had evidently been more young men to make the journey than there had been young women.

Many more of the Jews remained in Mesopotamia and still other Jewish communities were growing up in Egypt and in other parts of the world.

If you are a young man who has returned to the land and you desire to take a wife and there is a distinct shortage of marriageable women to be found among the Jews, then where do you turn? They began to take wives from among the non-Jewish peoples.

Alarmed at this situation, Ezra goes to pray to the Lord. He prays a prayer of repentance. While he is praying, someone makes a suggestion.

"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." (Ezra 10:3).

Ezra comes out from the house of prayer, hears the decision and agrees with it. As bad as divorce was, Ezra concluded that it was much worse to bring a curse on the covenant community. The motion had been made, it was seconded and put to a vote.

Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them. (Ezra 10:15).

There was a very small dissenting vote. Were the minority right or wrong? The Bible does not say. It is uncommon to see a dissenting vote in the Bible. Do you remember the last one previous to this? It was in the days of Joshua and Caleb. Everyone else wanted to abandon the proposal to enter the Promised Land. Only two people disagreed.

There is a lesson here. There are times when the minority vote is correct. They might not be seen to be correct until much later. That is okay. You be sure to be faithful, even if you are in the minority.

We are not told here who was right and who was wrong. But we ARE told that this issue had lasting repercussions. It is entirely possible that people now were using the issue of past practice as an excuse to dissolve their marriages.

The same thing is taking place in the church today. If statistics are correct, the church in America has reached the point where divorce statistics have nearly caught up with those of the pagans. We need to model holy marriages before the world.

- Are you presently married? You make a commitment today (especially if you are married to a Christian) that the two of you are going to remain married no matter what. Make a commitment to remove the word "divorce" from your vocabulary as it relates to your marriage.
- Are you presently separated or divorced? It may be that reconciliation is possible. But if it is not, stick with me because there is hope that is going to be presented before the end of this book. The hope of forgiveness and comfort.

But having said that, we need to point out and you would probably be the first to agree that divorce is always the result of sin on someone's part and sin always has

lasting repercussions.

For better or for worse, the divorces that had taken place in Ezra's day were still resounding with echos upon the failed marriages that are addressed here by Malachi.

Husbands and wives, you are leaving a legacy to those who will come after you. Make it a legacy of loyalty and commitment and love.

THE COMING OF THE LORD

"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. (Malachi 3:1).

Throughout the prophets, we have seen promise after promise that the Lord is going to come. But here we are told of the coming of one who would precede the coming of the Lord. It is the MESSENGER - the "Malachi" of God.

The duty of this messenger would be to clear the way before the Lord. He would be a forerunner. He would get the people ready to meet the Lord.

They would meet Him when He comes suddenly to His temple. We can recall the vividness of the description with which the Gospels describe the entrance of Jesus into the Temple. Coins clatter. Tables are overturned. A whiplash cracks. The Lord has come suddenly to His Temple.

The warning here is evident. It is that when the Lord comes, He is to come in judgment. His judgment is against those whose relationship with Him has been characterized by mediocrity.

And yet, in the midst of this warning, there is a promise of hope.

HEALING IN HIS WINGS

But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4:2).

What does this mean when it says that the Lord has wings?

The phrase translated “in his wings” also carries the idea of “corners” or an “outer edge.” It is often used this way to speak of literal wings (Genesis 1:21; 7:14; Exodus 19:4; 25:20; 37:9; Leviticus 1:17). But it can also be used to speak of the “corners” of a person’s robe. These outer corners of the robe came to be known as a person’s “wings.”

- In 1 Samuel 24:4 we read *that David arose and cut off the **edge** of Saul's robe secretly*
- Deuteronomy 22:12 *"You shall make yourself tassels on the four **corners** of your garment with which you cover yourself.*
- Deuteronomy 22:30 *"A man shall not take his father's wife so that he shall not uncover his father's **skirt**."*
- Ruth 3:9 - *And he said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your **covering** over your maid, for you are a close relative."*

In what way is there healing in the Lord’s wings? One significant fulfillment of this prophecy is to be found in Matthew 9:20 where a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Jesus and touched the **fringe** of His cloak. Do you see it? She touched His WINGS and in them she found healing.

This language is reminiscent of something Jesus said during his last week before his crucifixion. He looked over the city of Jerusalem and He wept.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (Matthew 23:37).

There is an invitation here. The offer that was made that day to Jerusalem is also made to you. You can come to Jesus today and find healing and mercy and forgiveness under His wings.