



A Bible Study
on the
Book of Malachi



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Malachi: Introduction

Author:

Malachi means “my messenger.” It may be a shortened form of a compound word spelled in a similar fashion that means “messenger of God.” Since the term occurs in **Malachi 3:1**, and since both prophets and priests were called messengers of the Lord (**Malachi 2:7**, **Haggai 1:13**), some have suggested that "Malachi" may only be generic title and that tradition has given the author that name. If that is the prophet's name, which is my opinion, very little is known about Malachi except what is stated in his book. His writing is the last Old Testament book and it seems he was the last Old Testament prophet.

Date:

It is believed that Malachi was written around 400 BC. You can tell by the events found in the book that it is obvious written after the temple work was finished. It was written shortly after the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It continues with some similar themes as seen in those two books: inter-marriage with pagans, (**Ezra 9-10**, **Nehemiah 13:23-27**, **Malachi 2:11**), a failure to tithe (**Nehemiah 13:10-14**, **Malachi 3:8-10**), and various social injustices (**Nehemiah 5:1-13**, **Malachi 3:5**). Malachi seems to reinforce the teachings of Nehemiah and Ezra, though he does add several new thoughts from a prophetic perspective. In order to compare it to the other books written around that time consider that Esther was written between 520-490 BC, Ezra was written around 440 BC, and Nehemiah was written around 430 BC. After the book of Malachi was written there would be “400 years of silence” before the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Theme:

A remnant of the Israelites, who had been exiled, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. God chose the time for this revival and guided them back home. The Lord also blessed them with a queen (Esther), a builder (Nehemiah), a priest (Ezra), and several prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The people were awaiting the “new covenant” as prophesied by Joel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. They were looking for the kingdom that would not perish (Daniel). Malachi's role is to call the nation to repentance. He challenges them to return to the covenant of God so that they might receive His blessings. The prophet commends the faithful but warns of the coming judgment. He urges the people to seek revival because the forerunner for the Messiah was coming quickly.

Audience:

The intended audience is the people of Judah that had returned from the Babylonian exile. They were given permission from the Persians to inhabit Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and fortify the walls around the city. It was King Artaxerxes himself that encouraged Ezra to reconstitute the temple worship (**Ezra 7:17**) and to make sure the law of Moses was being obeyed (**Ezra 7:25-26**).

Literary Notes:

Malachi is called an "oracle" (**Malachi 1:1**) and his book is written in what is called "lofty prose." It is because of this that Malachi is often referred to as "The Rhetorical Prophet" as he uses rhetoric and sarcasm to attract his audience. His style is as follows: (1) God makes a statement, (2) The hearers contest the statement, and (3) God demonstrates its truthfulness. These statements, objections, and defense arguments occurring seven times:

- 1) God loved Israel (1:2-5)
- 2) The priests despised God's name (1:6-7a)
- 3) The priests have offered defiled food (1:7a-14)
- 4) You have wearied the LORD (2:17)
- 5) Return to Me (3:7)
- 6) You have robbed Me (3:8-12)
- 7) You have spoken harshly against Me (3:13-14)

Key Verses:

Malachi 2:17, 3:1, 3:10, 4:5, 6

Contemporaries of the Prophet Malachi:

Leaders of the People of God included Ezra and Nehemiah who would have lived in this time. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during this period.

Outline of the Book:

- I. The Lord Loves His People (1:1-5)
- II. The Lord Discipline His People (1:6-3:18)
 - Issue #1 = The people dishonor the Lord in their religious practices (1:6-2:9)
 - Issue #2 = The people dishonor the Lord in their marriages (2:10-16)
 - Issue #3 = The people dishonor the Lord with their accusations (2:17-3:5)
 - Issue #4 = The people dishonor the Lord in their lack of giving (3:6-12)
 - Issue #5 = The people dishonor the Lord in their covenant (3:13-18)
- III. The Lord Judges His People (4:1-6)

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Lesson 1: The Lord Loves His People

Malachi 1:1-5

Introductory Thoughts

When the people returned under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel what do you think they expected to find in Jerusalem (**Ezra 1-6**)?

Had they heard of the reports of Nehemiah and others (**Nehemiah 1-2**)?

After Ezra led another group back to Jerusalem what happened (**Ezra 7-8**)?

What can we learn from reading the prophet Haggai?

What can we learn from reading the prophet Zechariah?

Sometime has passed since the previous events, and the covenant of God had been renewed, but there is new trouble on the horizon. Why do we assume that restoration is and once-and-for-all cure?

I. The Burden of Malachi (v.1)

How does the prophet describe his work? Why is that significant?

This is a technical term, but how does it describe the rest of the message?

What kind of a person loves to deliver bad news? Explain.

What should be our role with those who struggle with various burdens, struggles, sins, and trials (**Galatians 6:1-2**)?

II. The Love of God (v.2)

Before the judgment is issued, and the criticism is given, the Lord begins by affirming His love for the people. Why?

In spite of the fact that God loved them, how did the people respond?

What blessings and privileges had God provided them? Why?

God reminds the people of the covenant with Jacob, not Esau. Why?

III. The Covenant of God (vs.3-4)

Before the prophet can give the message, God reminds the people that He loves them and that He is their God. Why re-establish this covenant?

What had God done to punish the Edomites?

History tells us that the Edomites were overthrown by the Nabatean Arabs. This was prophesied by Obadiah. Why didn't they turn to God?

If God intended on saving all of mankind, and blessing all of humanity, why was He so harsh to Esau and gracious to Jacob?

How had the Edomites tried to block God's redemptive plan?

Why did the Israelites question the love of God?

IV. The Covenant of God (vs.5-6)

What description does God give to the land of the Edomites?

How does God describe His anger toward the people? Why?

Whose responsibility was it to teach holiness in the home?

Whose responsibility was it to teach holiness to the nation (v.6, 2:9, 16)?

The rest of this chapter, and the next, reveal that the priests were not loyal to God in the keeping of the sacrifices and offerings. What angers God the most about this irreverence?

Concluding Thoughts

How can seeing the love of God in any situation change our outlook?

Who is the Master? Who is the servant? Why is that important to remember?

Those who are "God's elect" have great responsibility. Does God hold us to a higher standard? If so, why?

The arrogance and ignorance of the people is seen in that they don't think they have done anything wrong toward God (v.6). How have they shamed His name?

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Lesson 2: The Lord Discipline His People

Malachi 1:6-3:18

Introductory Thoughts

Why does God require holiness and loyalty of His children?

What does it tell you when people become careless?

I. The First Charge: The people dishonor the Lord in their religious practices (1:6-2:9)

How did the priest react to the news that they had despised the Lord's name?

What evidence does Malachi give as proof (1:7-14)?

What should they have been doing when they learned of these sins?

What is their attitude concerning the altar and its offerings (1:12-13)?

The Lord pronounces a curse on the priests (2:1-9), and He rebukes them in the presence of all the assembly. How do you think this was received?

In what ways had they broken the Levitical covenant?

What does it say to the other nations that these people wear the "name" of God, but they refuse to follow the "ways" of God?

Why does God put so much emphasis on the teaching of the law?

II. The Second Charge: The people dishonor the Lord in their marriages (2:10-16)

How had the men broken their marriage vows?

What did Ezra do about this sin in his day (**Ezra 9-10**)?

Who truly bore the sorrow of this event? What are God's thoughts on divorce?

How did the people react to this charge against them?

What evidence does Malachi give as proof (2:14-16)?

III. The Third Charge: The people dishonor the Lord with their accusations (2:17-3:5)

Instead of owning up to their mistakes, confessing their sin, and repenting of it, the people seem to take pleasure in arguing with God. Why?

How does the text describe God as He continually listens to their accusations?

How did the people react to this charge against them?

What evidence does Malachi give as proof (2:17)?

IV. The Fourth Charge: The people dishonor the Lord in their lack of giving (3:6-12)

The term "rob" has a deliberate negative connotation. Why use it?

The people are challenged to get back to the Lord's ordinances. If they were not following His laws and customs, what/whom were they following?

How did the people react to this charge against them?

What evidence does Malachi give as proof (3:8)?

V. The Final Charge: The people dishonor the Lord in their covenant (3:13-18)

If the people are unwilling to respect the covenant of God, why is God so determined to see it fulfilled? What does that say about Him?

What kind of words did the people speak against the Lord?

How did the people react to this charge against them?

What evidence does Malachi give as proof (3:14-15)?

Concluding Thoughts

Why are the people exhorted to be faithful in their giving?

Why are the people exhorted to be faithful in their service?

As we look ahead, what can we determine is both the hope of mankind and the final stage in God's redemptive plan for humanity?

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Lesson 3: The Lord Judges His People

Malachi 4:1-6

Introductory Thoughts

These final six verses, and final chapter of this prophetic book, are the last words the people of God will hear until the arrival of John the Baptist. How often do you think they looked to these words for hope? Why?

What does it tell us about God's character when He continually answers the world's problems, when He has every reason to ignore our requests?

When God promises to come and deliver His people, how do you think that made them feel? Why?

How often do you think about the Second Coming of Jesus? Why?

I. The Wicked Will Be Judged (v.1)

Do you think the wicked fear judgment? Should the righteous fear judgment?

The Bible uses the terms: The Great Day of God, The Day of the Lord, the Final Admonition, The Great Day of the Lord, the Day of God's judgment on the Wicked, and many other terms to describe judgment. Explain.

How can this promise of action in the future offer hope to people today?

What parallels can be drawn between this passage and **Revelation 22:11-15**?

Will God leave any "root" or "branch" out of the fire? Explain.

II. The Messiah Will Be Coming (vs.2-3)

The wicked will be punished and the righteous will be rewarded on the same day (Judgment - **Hebrews 9:27**). What will it be like on that day?

What does this mean for all the nations (1:11-14, 2:9, 3:12)?

How is the Messiah described here (**Matthew 12:15, Revelation 21:4**)?

Did Jesus bring healing and fear at the same time? Explain.

III. The Law of Moses Will Be Remembered (v.4)

Why is important to remember both what God has done and what He will do?

Which Israelites were supposed to adhere to the law of Moses which was given at Mt. Sinai (Horeb is just another name for it)?

How does God refer to Moses? Why is that significant?

What does this have in common with this particular prophesy (1:6)?

The Israelites should have been ashamed of the fact that they did not know the Law of Moses. How could they have prevented this error?

IV. The Forerunner Will Be Coming (vs.5-6)

These specific prophesies of Moses and Elijah are reflected in a New Testament story in **Matthew 17:1-5**. What happened in that event?

What is the significance of linking Moses and Elijah?

What did Jesus teach concerning their work?

When John the Baptist arrives in the New Testament, how is he described by both Jesus and the gospel writers (**Matthew 17:10-13**)?

Why was this such a hopeful concept to the Jews?

Is it possible for another Moses and Elijah to come and them not know it?

The fact that God promises to "*strike the earth with a curse*" is seen in **Zechariah 5:3, 14:12**. How would that come to fruition?

Concluding Thoughts

How long would it be until John the Baptist and Jesus arrived on the earth?

What changes can you see from these people and the Jews of the New Testament?

How could the Christian religion change over the next several generations?

Why should this be a concern for the present generation? What can we do?