

MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

This book was written between 445-432 B.C. between the first and second visits of Nehemiah to Jerusalem. The Biblical background then is Ezra 7-10 and the book of Nehemiah.

The closing thought of the Old Testament is “Christ is coming.” The opening point of the New Testament is “Christ has come.”

Malachi means “my messenger.” In Malachi we meet a new style of address known as the didactic-dialectic method of speaking.

In this type of teaching an,

1. Assertion or charge is made,
2. A fancied objection is raised by the hearers,
3. And a refutation to the objection is presented by the speaker.

There were both the moral and ceremonial aspects of the Divine law to which the people of God had become indifferent. The exiles had been back in Jerusalem for over 100 years; but instead of getting better, they had become worse.

The people were not living up to the conditions stipulated. God had fulfilled His part.

1. God had chastised by captivity.
2. He had brought back a remnant.
3. He had forgiven their sins.
4. He had kept His promise to them.

Worship was in a state of decay. The priesthood had allowed it to degenerate to the point of accepting the refuse of the flocks and herds as sacrifices. The people had failed to bring in their tithes, thus robbing God. The Jews were

divorcing their wives and marrying heathen women. The prophet makes it clear that such flagrant disregard for God's law can only result in thwarting the Divine purpose in securing a pure people unto God.

Chapter 1

Verse 1

"To Israel" refers to the whole nation with whom God had made His covenant and to whom he now addresses His message. (Exodus 24:1-8)

Verses 2-3

God declares His love for the people. By His love He seeks to bring home to the hearts of His hearers their own ingratitude and lack of devotion toward Him. They had come to the conclusion that God did not love them. They looked at the conditions round about and at their own state of mind and had come to the conclusion that God did not love them otherwise things would have been different.

To prove that God did not love them, they used the illustration of Jacob and Esau. God loved Jacob but He hated Esau. Jacob and Esau represent the two nations of Israel and Edom. Edom became more desolate while Israel's land was being cultivated. Edom returned to its primitive state, a habitation for wild animals.

Verses 4-5

God's response to Edom's boast of rebuilding was, "They may build, but I will tear down." History verifies God's words. After the Chaldeans came, the Nabateans drove them out. They were conquered by the Maccabees, and finally the Romans drove them into the eastern deserts.

Verse 6

In these verses God is addressing their attitude of ingratitude. He rebukes the priests and the people by saying they did not respect and honor Him. By their own standards God was entitled to respect and honor. But instead of honor, the priests had despised His name and the glory He should have received.

Verse 7

They ask, “How have we despised Thy name?” God answered, “You presented defiled (or polluted) food upon My altar.” This refers not to the showbread but to the sacrifices offered.

Verse 8

They were offering the blind, the lame, and the sick from among the flocks and herds and were saying, “It is not evil.” The Law required that all sacrifices be perfect and without blemish and that only the best be offered to the Lord.

Verse 9

If it was an insult to offer such a worthless gift to a governor, a political ruler, how much more is it an insult to offer such to God? The priests were responsible for this bad attitude toward God and His worship. God would not hear and answer their prayers.

Verse 10

This verse expressed a wish that there could be found one among them with sufficient jealousy for God and His altar to keep God from closing the doors against such profane worship. No worship is better than one who rejects the divine honor and insults God with contempt.

“To kindle fire” was to light it in vain offering empty sacrifices which God would not receive.

Verse 11

The Jews were profaning the name of God and showing no respect to God, and God said, "Then the Gentiles would offer a pure and acceptable worship". The “pure grain offering” is an offering of praise, the fruit of the lips and the doing of good in a holy life. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Through the gospel of the Messiah, God’s name would be revered as great.

Verse 12

God’s rebuke is that the very people who should have been a living example of faith in God and of devotion to Him in worship, were actually making a mockery

and scandal of their exalted responsibility. This was their reaction to God's love; they held both the altar and offering in contempt. There is lesson we can learn from all this that applies to us today.

If worshipers of today offer a meaningless religious service to God, they are being contemptible before God.

Verses 13-14

Their religion was a tiresome chore. It was not one of joy growing out of gratitude. God had condemned stealing. He would not accept an offering that had been stolen. The cheater or dishonest individual who vows to God and pays the vow with a blemished animal was to be cursed.

Chapter 2

Verses 1-2

The commandments or curses were addressed to, and carried out against the priests only. They had insulted the name of God and had brought it into disrespect, now they must give glory to it or suffer the consequences of God's wrath.

Verses 3-4

This verse speaks of spreading refuse on the face of the priests. This indicates humiliation in which the priests are treated as dirt, filth, or dung, making them unfit for the service of the Lord and fit only to be carried away outside the camp away from God's presence.

Verses 5-7

The covenant God made with the priestly tribe was one of life and peace. When the priesthood kept the covenant, he found true peace as God had promised. The priest was both a teacher of the law and a judge between the people concerning differences which were to be decided by the law.

Verse 8

God brings three charges against the priests.

1. "You have turned aside from the way."

2. "You have caused many to stumble by the instruction."
3. "You have corrupted the covenant of Levi."

Verse 9

God held the priests contemptible and abased before all the people. They had lost all sense of prestige because they had shown favor for one against another and were not keeping God's laws.

Verses 10-11

In their sinning through the divorce of their wives and marrying foreign women, they were dealing treacherously against their brothers in a common faith. They were profaning the covenant God had made with them at Sinai and by which they had been made sons and daughters of God. (Exodus 19:5-6)

Israel was to have been a "holy nation" to God, worshiping Him "in the beauty of holiness," but they had profaned this by marrying "the daughters of a foreign god." These women were idolatresses, the worshipers of a heathen deity. God had specifically forbidden such intermarriage. (Exodus 34:16)

Solomon violated this law and opened the door for idolatry to enter into Judah. (I Kings 11:1-2)

Verse 12

God will punish this sin by cutting off every man who commits it.

Verse 13

Another heinous sin they were committing was that they were putting away their Hebrew wives, their faithful companions, causing them to cover the altar with their tears and weeping to such a degree that the fire was extinguished and the sacrifices were never received but rather rejected by God.

Verse 14

God tells them to examine themselves because anyone wishing to have a Godly Spirit would not put away his Hebrew wife and marry a heathen woman.

Verse 15

Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. Age does not change the relationship of youth's love and pledge.

Verse 16

From the creation God has intended that there should be one woman for one man; He intended that these should be one, divisible only by death. God hates those who put away their wives willfully, ignoring her tears and her feelings, covering his garments with wrong.

Verse 17

This is an introduction to the rest of the book of Malachi. The faithless multitude wearies God. They wear His patience thin by their skeptical attitude toward Him. This address is not to any one class in particular but to the large majority who had lost their faith in God. There was a remnant ready to hear.

God makes two charges against self-righteous query.

1. The people challenged the moral government of God. They called into question the righteousness and holiness of His judgments and ways by charging, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord," and that God delights in them.
2. They ask, "Where is the God of justice?" Instead of bringing the enemies to judgment, God acts in their behalf.

Chapter 3

Verse 1

God responds to the question, "Where is the God of justice?" by saying He will come, and suddenly. But before He comes He will send His messenger, John the Baptist, to prepare the way before Him.

“Come suddenly,” means to come at once, instantaneously unannounced. It does not mean immediately. The “temple” refers to the spiritual temple. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant, the covenant of peace and the bond that binds God’s people to Himself.

Verse 2

A “refiner’s fire” means the Lord will come as a smelter, purging the dross from the silver.

A “fuller” is one who washes clothes, who cleans with strong lye soap.

Verse 3

Jesus will sit as a judge purifying and cleansing, but not necessarily as a destroyer. His purifying and purging operation will be the sons of Levi, the priests, who had been brought under such severe condemnation.

This new refined priesthood is the spiritual priesthood under the New Covenant, whose sacrifices are those of praise and thanksgiving.

Christians are the “priests” today.

Verse 4

Under those conditions the offerings of Judah, the new nation, and Jerusalem, the new city, into which the redeemed and purified have come, will be pleasant and acceptable to God. (1 Peter 2:5, 9)(Hebrews 13:15-16)

Verses 5-6

God will not only come in judgment against the priests, but He will come also against all the wicked among the people. God will judge their moral and ethical sins. The root of their actions was clear, they did not fear God.

Verses 7-10

God offers them a charge and a challenge.

The people had robbed God of their tithes and offerings. He challenges them to bring them in and prove God if He will not pour out blessings beyond their imagination.

To rob our fellow man is a great sin, but to rob God should be unthinkable. Tithes and offerings freely given are acknowledgments of God's ownership and of man's stewardship. Because of their refusal to acknowledge God's claim and their disposition to rob Him, they had been cursed. God's charge is followed by a challenge, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse."

Verses 11-12

God would bless them so richly and He would destroy "the devourer." The "devourer" is the locust and hail, the blasting and mildew. (Amos 4:9, scorching wind)

Verse 13

God brings another charge against the people, "Your words have been arrogant against Me."

Verses 14-15

Their arrogant words were, "It is vain to serve God," and "What profit is it that we have kept His charge?" It is as if they were serving the Lord for hire and as if He was indebted to them for their service.

They were prone to call the arrogant sinners a happy lot; for they appeared to prosper and to get great enjoyment from life.

Verses 16-18

The book of remembrance is the life, deeds, and needs of them that fear God, who hold His name in reverence and who keep Him in their thoughts. These people will be God's own possession.

In the day of God's judgment, He will be mindful of those who serve Him, and whose names are written in the book of remembrance. This is not to be confined just to the final judgment, for God is continuously coming into judgment against wicked societies and nations.

Chapter 4

Verse 1

“The day is coming” is a typical reference used by the prophets in reference to the judgment day. It refers to a complete destruction of the wicked, total and complete, from the face of God at Christ’s coming.

Verse 2

This verse describes the reward of the righteous. They will frolic or skip about like calves from the stall.

Verse 3

“Tread down” indicates a complete victory of the righteous and righteousness over the wicked and wickedness.

Verses 4-5

They are to remember the Law of Moses and the statutes and ordinances. They must respect and keep the law. “Horeb” is another name for Sinai, where through scenes of awe, terror, and wonder, God made known His law.

Verse 6

Before the great and terrible judgment day, refining and purifying will come, God promises to send Elijah the prophet. This promise was fulfilled in John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way for Christ.

God’s mission for John the Baptist:

1. Was to turn the affections of the people back to God and His Divine law.
2. He was to restore a right relationship between parents and children.
3. To turn the hearts of the children to the ancestral religion of their fathers.

In this condition of heart, they would be ready to receive the Messiah.

Elijah had preached repentance and a return to God. This also was the preaching of John the Baptist. A return to God was the only way to avert destruction. Some harkened, most did not.

As a result, God destroyed their city and their land. When Jesus left their temple desolate, it was like a carcass, fit only for the vultures. The vultures or eagles came and the carcass was devoured, in 70 A.D.

The book of Malachi serves as a fitting close to God's ancient revelation to His people.

1. A final appeal is made to the people to purge out the wickedness found among them and to render to God an acceptable service.
2. A final warning is given of inevitable judgment upon the wicked.
3. A final promise is made of God's righteousness to be provided in Him who would be the personal bond of unity between God and His people.

There was no more God could say or do; therefore, no word was heard from Him until the silence was broken by the messenger who would introduce the Messiah, about 400 years later.

“Behold the Lamb of God.” (John 1:29).