

Malachi

INTRODUCTION

Malachi is the last of a number of divinely inspired men who, over a period of a thousand years, foretold the coming of the Just One. Not only did they prophesy about the coming Messiah, but they clearly spelled out to the people their sins and warned them of God's righteous judgment.

Following their return from exile, the people of Israel lived as a restored community in the land of Palestine. Instead of learning from their past negative experiences and returning to the worship and service of the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they became immoral and careless. The ritual and political reforms initiated by the postcaptivity leaders Nehemiah and Ezra had not prevented a serious spiritual decline among the Israelite population. This grave situation caused Malachi to be burdened heavily with the spiritual problems of his people. With divine fervency he addressed their common disregard for their loving Lord.

In his opening statement Malachi points out God's unchanging love for His people, due to His mercy that endures forever. This is the background for the following rebukes and exhortations. First, the prophet addresses the arrogant, open contempt of the priests for the Law and their negative influence upon the people. He points out to them that they cause many to stumble in sin. Therefore he warns them that the Lord will not be an idle spectator but, unless they repent, will severely punish them.

Next he addresses, in no uncertain terms, the treachery of priests and laymen in divorcing faithful wives and marrying heathen women who practice idol worship. This is followed by an earnest plea to guard their passions and be faithful to the wives of their youth, given to them by the Lord.

The prophet furthermore rebukes the irreligious practices of the people, their denial of God's justice, and their defrauding the Lord by withholding the required tithes and offerings.

In glowing and fervent language Malachi continues to describe the original type of priesthood. He prophesies of the Sun of Righteousness, the Messenger of the covenant, and the great and terrible day of divine judgment in which the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished.

Finally, Malachi exhorts the people to observe the laws given to Israel through Moses and promises a coming Messiah and His forerunner Elijah (John the Baptist). This statement concludes the Old Testament and ties it to the good news of God's provision in the Sun of Righteousness described in the New Testament.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible Introduction to Malachi, John Louwerse, M. A. Ling)

Malachi 1:1-14

It is in vain that the sinner thinks to reverse the unalterable sentence of God, when once it has gone forth. Though Edom, after his disaster, rebuilt his cities, God has long since *thrown them down* (v. 4). On the other hand, the Jews still exist as a distinct people, though scattered among the nations; and as the first part of the prophecy has been fulfilled in Edom's extinction, so shall the rest of it also come to pass in Israel's restoration: and then, in respect to both fulfillments alike, the people of God's covenant of grace, when they shall see the event with their eyes, shall say, "The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel" (v. 5). Let sinners remember that if they will not glorify God in their gratuitous salvation, they must glorify Him in their deserved condemnation.

The infinite greatness of God's love to us calls for a return of love on our part. We call Him rightly Father and Lord (v. 6): do we, then, give Him the "honor" which is due to a father, and the reverent "fear" which is due to a master? Acts of loving obedience, not empty professions, are the test. Let us, in our self-examination on this point, beware of the blinding influences of self-love. When the Word of God condemns us, let us not evade its stroke by asking, in self-satisfied complacency, "Wherein have we despised Thy name?" Those who offer to God the dregs of their time, their strength, and their means, are virtually offering "polluted bread upon the altar of God," and treat "the table of the Lord" as "contemptible" (v. 7).

It is vain to pray and expect "God will be gracious unto us," when we are habitually and willfully acting ungraciously towards Him (v. 9). God has "no pleasure in fools" (v. 10; Eccl. 5:4). Better no offerings than hypocritical ones, which God will not accept. The church "doors" were better altogether "shut" than opened to subserve self-deceit and hypocrisy.

When the Jewish Church failed to magnify the Lord, the kingdom of God was taken from them and passed to the Gentiles. Again, when the present Gentile Church shall cease duly to glorify God, her candlestick shall be removed. And then shall a new and brighter order of things begin, when from Jerusalem the Gospel word shall go forth, and the name of the Lord shall be great among all nations, "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same" (v. 11).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

God's prophets were His witnesses for Him and His authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, attesting God's providences in His dealings with people and His grace concerning His church. (Matthew Henry) **What does "The burden of the word of the Lord" (Mal.3:1) intimate?**

The Lord's word to the priests in Malachi 1:10 was: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." **What was the root cause of Israel's problem that God would not accept their offerings?**

Rom. 12:1-2 1 Pet. 2:9 1 Pet. 3:8

When the church ceases to give God the proper respect and glorification, especially when partaking of the Lord's supper, what will be God's response to them?

Rev. 2:1-3:22

Malachi 2:1-17

The covenant made with Christians, who are spiritually "priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6), is essentially the same as that which God established with Levi. It is a covenant of grace whereby God freely gives, in Christ, "life and peace" (v. 5). On the other hand, God requires on man's part reverent "fear," faith, and obedience. Levi accepted and regarded the covenant, and so experienced the faithfulness of God to His gracious promises (v. 5). So shall we also know by blessed experience the grace and love of God, if only "the law of truth" be in our mouth, as it was in the mouth of Levi (v. 6). Though it cannot be said of the children of God, They have no sin, it will be said of them at the last judgment, "In their mouth was found no guile" (Rev. 14:5). God Himself shall testify of the believer, as He did of Levi and of Enoch, "He walked with me in peace and equity."

To "deal treacherously against our brethren" is therefore to deal treacherously against our common God and Father (v. 10). They who violate the marriage-covenant, by separating from, or by acting unfaithfully to, their one lawful wife, "profane the holiness of God," and transgress against the common Church of God, which He so gratuitously hath "loved" (v. 11). Shame and a curse shall be on him that "takes the members of Christ, and makes them the members of an harlot," becoming "joined" as "one body" (1 Cor. 7:16) to "the daughter" of fornication. "The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this" (v. 12). No offerings or religious services will save either minister or people who sin thus presumptuously, from the awful penalty. The tears of those who are wronged plead with God that He should "not accept with good will the offering" of the wrong doers (v. 13).

It is vain to try to "cover" from God's cognizance of "violence" and wrong: He will tear off the "garment" of dissimulation (hiding true feelings, thoughts, or intentions). Therefore, let all "take heed to their spirit," for all sin begins

there. If we would retain the good Spirit of God, who dwells in His elect people, we must take heed diligently to shun all "filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Men "weary the Lord" when they justify themselves in sin (v. 17). Such self-justifiers are often those who arraign the justice of God. Instead of discerning their chastisements to be the just and merciful consequences of their sins, from which God would have them to flee in time, they assert that their own trials, and the prosperity of many around them, whom they consider worse than themselves, are proofs that God is indifferent to, or even delights in, evil doers. It is to be the characteristic especially of the last days, that men shall say, "Where is the God of judgment?" (v. 17) May we be found loyal to our King in His visible absence, that so we may be owned as His when He shall come in personal and manifested glory as the Almighty Judge!

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

God first opens the wound and then applies the healing balm. (Matthew Henry) **What are the sins Malachi denounces in the lives of the priests and the people?**

Mal. 1:1-14 Mal. 2:1-16

What were the Hebrews doing spiritually to themselves by marrying heathen women.

Ezra 10:1-3 Neh. 13:23-28 Mal. 2:11-12

Why does God instruct believers to seek a believing partner?

Do you think the majority of people today think as those in Malachi's day when they say in Malachi 2:17: "Where is the God of judgment?"

Malachi 3:1-18

As John the Baptist "prepared the way" before the Lord at His first coming, so ministers now, as the "messengers of the Lord of hosts" (2:7), are preparing the way before the Lord against His second coming. To believers, the announcement of the Gospel of "the messenger of the covenant" is full of joy. For believers a saving interest in the covenant by faith, and therefore they truly "seek and delight in" the Savior and His salvation. But to unbelievers the Gospel message heard, but not hearkened to, is only the seal of increased condemnation.

These two classes, which are already being secretly separated from one another by the unobserved judicial process even now going forward, shall be fully, manifestly, and finally separated at the glorious appearing of the Lord from heaven. It becomes us, therefore, to ask, "Who shall stand when He appeareth?" (3:2) If our faith in the Savior be the genuine work of His Holy Spirit, it shall stand alike the furnace of affliction which is sent now to remove the believer's dross, and also the last searching judgment, when the Judge "shall sit" upon His throne (v. 3). The believer needs not fear the fiery trial of afflictions and temptations to which he is subjected now. Christ will adjust the intensity of the fire, and the length of time during which his servants are exposed to it, with the nicest adaptation to their spiritual needs. And when His image is reflected in the glowing mass, the Heavenly Refiner will remove the thoroughly purified metal from the flame (v. 3).

The Jews, as a nation, have passed, and are passing, through such a fiery trial. The final result shall be, in the wonderful grace of God, "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old" (v. 4). On the other hand, to the sceptics who mockingly ask, "Where is the God of judgment?" (2:17). He will "come near to judgment" (v. 5). Slow as he seems in executing wrath upon the ungodly, He is witness of all their ways, and soon will appear as "a swift witness" against them. For He is the same unchanging God (v. 6) at all times—on the one hand, consuming the ungodly at last, who continue to harden themselves against His love; and, on the other hand, sparing (v. 17) His elect, not for their goodness, but because of His own covenant of grace: as He says, "I am the Lord: I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." It was because of His ancient covenant with Jacob that God continued so lovingly to beseech the Jews, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (v. 7). But how sad a contrast to His tenderness does their insensibility present! "Wherein shall we return?" they reply, in the tone of injured innocence. And yet there had been a hereditary succession of transgression, the "fathers" having "gone away from God's ordinances," and the children following in their steps. A legacy of sin proves to be a legacy of sorrow. The only way to bar the entail (consequence) of the "curse" (v. 9) is to return to the Lord in repentance, and He will return to men with blessings. The change must be in the sinner, not in God: for He changes not (v. 6). They who try to "rob God" only rob themselves (v. 8). To withhold from the cause of God and of charity what is His just due, is virtually robbing God. Yet how many who have a high name for religion, in the esteem both of the world and of themselves, have no scruple about such robbery, and would indignantly repudiate the charge, saying, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?"

Religion is not a matter of bargaining, but it is the love of God producing in the believer love, thankfulness, and instinctive obedience. Such as have this true love to God are truly "happy," which the "proud" never can be (v. 15); for pride is its own punishment.

Who is the messenger spoken of in Mal 3:1 and the refiner spoken of in Mal 3:2-3?

Isa. 40:3 Matt. 3:1-3 Matt. 3:11-12 Matt. 11:7-10 Matt. 21:12 Matt. 26:26-28 Luke 1:16-17

How have the people robbed God?

What is the people's response to the accusation of robbing God?

How can they remove the curse given to them in Mal 3:9?

Those in Malachi 3:10 are asked to "try Me (God)"? **How can they or we do that?**

What promise is there for those who fear the Lord and meditate upon His name?

Mal. 3:16-18

Malachi 4:1-6

The prospect of the day of judgment is a powerful stimulus to awaken sinners from their fatal slumber, and to stir up believers to increased diligence in the work of the Lord. The fire of God's wrath shall "burn up" utterly the proud transgressors, so as to leave them "neither root nor branch" (v. 1). The kingdom of this earth, so long usurped by Satan, shall be forever rid of him, and of all that do his bidding. The same Lord who shall be as a consuming fire to the ungodly, shall arise unto them that fear His name as "the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings" (v. 2). He is already their sun and shield (Ps. 84:11), and the Lord their righteousness (Jer. 23:6). He shall then crown the perfected work of grace *in* them with glory put *upon* them. They shall "go forth" emancipated from all the bonds of their present corruption, and "shall shine forth as the sun," reflecting Christ's brightness, "in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

Both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus announced the kingdom of heaven as at hand. But the unbelief of the Jews caused an adjournment of it for a time fixed in the counsels of God, just as the inheritance of Canaan, which was designed by the grace of God for the Israelites immediately after the exodus from Egypt, was through the perversity of the people deferred for forty years. Cf. Matt, 23:37-39 with Num. 14:34. When Israel shall turn to the Lord, at the Lord's second coming, the kingdom shall then be no longer delayed, but shall come visibly, in manifested glory and blessedness, to the godly. But all who have not passed from under the condemnation of the law, through faith in the justifying righteousness and blood of Christ, shall be "smitten with a curse." This awful closing word of the Old Testament should ever ring in the ears of the unconverted, until they have found deliverance from the curse, in the Savior, who has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. Then shall we realize, by blessed experience the closing prayer of the New Testament, "The *Grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

Did or does Elijah come at Christ's first or second advent?

Mal. 4:5

With Christ's first and second advent in mind explain Malachi 4:6: "Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse".

Ezek. 38:22-23 Zech. 14:12 Rev. 6:12-16

In Malachi 2:17 the people ask "Where is the God of justice"? **How is this questioned answered in chapters 3 and 4 of Malachi?**

In what ways does the book of Malachi prepare the reader for the New Testament dispensation? (Notice how the Old Testament ends with the word "curse".)