

Malachi – An Introduction

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. Malachi concludes the Old Testament while providing an introduction to the New Testament.

Who wrote the book of Malachi? Malachi

Malachi is not mentioned by name in any other books of the Bible. His parents, tribe and city of origin were not provided.

Who was the target audience? The people of Judah (referred to as Israel)

Judah, the tribe of Benjamin and some of the Levites were the ones who continued to worship at the temple in Jerusalem after Solomon died. The northern tribes all broke away and set up their own king and their own places of worship.

When was Malachi written? We don't know for sure but it is widely agreed that he prophesied after the return from the exile.

Unlike Haggai, Malachi did not provide dates when his prophecy was given. Based on the content of Malachi, it seems clear that he came after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Malachi assumes the existence of the temple and is therefore after Haggai and Zechariah. Some of the sins of the people that Malachi addresses are similar to sins that Nehemiah addressed. It may be that Malachi and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Just as Haggai supported the work of Zerubbabel, so Malachi may have supported the work of Nehemiah.

Where was Malachi written? It was probably written in Jerusalem but that is not certain.

The references to the temple, the priests, the sacrifices and the tithes make it reasonable to think that the prophecy was given in Jerusalem.

Why was Malachi written? It was written to encourage Judah to submit to the guardianship of the Mosaic Law while they awaited the arrival of the Messiah.

While Judah was awaiting the Messiah, their guardian, the Law, revealed that they were sinners. While still under the law, the people of Judah needed to obey the law in order to be blessed. Disobedience brought curses. The writing of Malachi was closer to the coming of the Messiah than any other Old Testament prophet. Judah was assured that the Messiah would suddenly come to his temple. "Elijah" would come before the Messiah to prepare the way.

Structure and Content

Malachi has a unique structure. In between the introduction and the conclusion there are six assertions by God concerning Israel. After the assertion, Malachi recites the people's questioning of God's assertions. God then responds to the people's questions and objections.

- Intro 1:1 – God's message to Israel (Judah) through Malachi
- A series of six "conversations" which include an assertion by God, question(s) by Israel, and a response by God
 - God Loves Jacob 1:2-5
 - The priests dishonor God by their illegal sacrifices and other failures as teachers of God's law 1:6-2:9
 - Judah profanes the covenant by marrying pagan women and divorcing their first wives 2:10-16
 - The people believe that God is not just because the wicked prosper 2:17-3:5
 - The people rob God by not giving their tithes 3:6-12
 - The people believe that it is vain to serve God because he doesn't distinguish between the good and evil 3:13-4:3
- Conclusion 4:4-6 – God will send Elijah the prophet before the day of Yahweh.

Malachi 1:1-5 – God’s Love

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and the last of the Old Testament prophets. Unlike Haggai, Malachi did not provide a date for when his prophecy was given. Based on the content of Malachi, it seems clear that he came after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Malachi concludes the Old Testament while providing an introduction to the New Testament. In between the introduction and conclusion of Malachi are six assertions made by God. Each assertion is followed by the people’s objection to the assertion. God then gives a response to each of the objections. The first assertion lays a foundation for the book of Malachi.

Read Malachi 1:1-5.

Who were the recipients of this prophecy? Whom did God chose to deliver his word? What do we know about the prophet Malachi? What does “Malachi” mean? (1:1)

What is God’s assertion in the beginning of verse 2?

What is the people’s question / objection in the middle of verse 2?

When are some situations and circumstances when people question God’s love? Why did the people of Israel/Judah question God’s love? What did this question reveal about the people of Israel/Judah at that time?

God responded to the people’s question with his own question for them in verse 2. What was this question? God responded to the people questioning his love by reminding them of Jacob and Esau. Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. Esau was born first. What did God say about Jacob and Esau?

While the descendants of Jacob and Esau are primarily in view here, it is important to go back and look at the twin brothers. How did God love Jacob? How did God hate Esau? Some people object to the idea of God hating someone. Some commentators say that “hate” means “loves less”. What do you think “hate” means in this context? How did Paul understand this verse when he quoted it in Romans 9:13?

We saw in the book of Galatians how God chose Isaac, the son of Sarah, and not Ishmael, the son of the slave? In Genesis 21:12, quoted in Romans 9:7 and Hebrews 11:18, God said that “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” God’s election is not just in the New Testament. It goes back to Genesis. What was the basis for God’s election of Jacob over Esau? See Genesis 25:23 and Romans 9:10-12. In general, what is the basis for God’s election? If God loves us because we have done something to deserve it then we can also do something to lose God’s love. But, if God chooses to love us based on his sovereign purpose then God’s love is not based on our performance.

There is a principle here that applies to us. How do we question God’s love for us? From the New Testament, how do we know that God loves us? See 1 John 3:16 and 1 John 4:19.

In verses 3 and 4, how did God show his “hate” for the descendants of Esau?

From verse 5, what is the result of God’s love of Jacob and his hate of Esau?

What was the difference between God’s discipline of Judah and his punishment of the descendants of Esau?

If God has chosen us to be his child but we doubt his love for us, what problems can result from this?

Esau was also known by the name Edom. His descendants were the Edomites. The Edomites lived in the hill country of Se’ir. Teman is also a name used for either the Edomites or an area where they lived.

Malachi 1:6-2:3 – The Priests Despise God’s Name

God loved Jacob and chose to enter into a covenant relationship with his offspring. The descendants of Jacob did not recognize God’s special love for them. As a result, they did not treat God with respect and lived selfish and sinful lives. The priests should have been teaching the people the truth about God but instead they gave the people a distorted view of God. God used Malachi to rebuke the priests.

Read Malachi 1:6-14.

In verse 6, what was God’s assertion concerning the priests? How did the priests respond to this assertion?

In verse 7, how had the priests despised God’s name?

The priests wanted to know how they had polluted God. Based on verses 7 and 8, how had the priests despised God’s name and Yahweh’s table? What is Yahweh’s table? See Ezekiel 41:22 for the “table that is before Yahweh”.

What were the basic requirements for an animal which was to be sacrificed at the alter of God? See Leviticus 22:2, 17-32. Do you think the priests were ignorant of the law or were they willfully disobeying God?

How were the priests treating God with less respect than they would their governor or even an ordinary guest? (1:8)

God asked the priests a common sense question. If they didn’t respect God, should they expect a favorable and gracious response from God in return? The obvious answer is, “No”. (1:9)

If there was a choice between polluted sacrifices and no sacrifices at all, what would God choose? If God did not accept their defective offerings, why did they still offer them? (1:10)

Should verse 11 be taken as something that was happening at the time of Malachi or should it be understood as a prophetic prediction of what Jesus told the woman of Samaria? The true worshipers of God will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). See Isaiah 59:19, 66:19-20.

In verses 12 and 13, what do the priests say about the alter and the offerings. What offerings do they sacrifice which God said that they should not sacrifice?

Instead of receiving God's blessing from their offerings, what did they receive? Why were unblemished offerings so important to God? (1:14)

Read Malachi 2:1-3.

What did God say would happen to the priests if they did not honor his name? (2:1-2)

What was already happening to the priests because they did not honor God's name? (2:2)

When an offering was made on the alter, certain parts of the offering were removed, taken outside the camp and burned. One of these parts was the dung of the animal. What did God say he would do to the priests if they persisted in their disobedience? (2:3)

We are no longer required to bring offerings of animals. Christ is our once for all sacrifice for our sins. In what ways do people dishonor Christ's sacrifice on the cross?

This section concerning the priests continues through verse 2:9. We will resume this section on the priests next time.

Malachi 2:4-16 – Ungodly Marriages

After God declared his love for Jacob, God rebuked the priests for despising his name. They disregarded God's law and offered blemished and lame sacrifices. God preferred that they didn't bring any sacrifices as opposed to bringing sacrifices that showed that the priests had no fear of God. God's rebuke of the priests continued. They broke the covenant that he made with Levi. After God finished with the priests, God rebuked the people who despised God's institution of marriage by marrying foreign women and divorcing their Jewish wives.

Read Malachi 2:4-9.

In verse 3, God said that he would rebuke the priests' offspring. He would treat the priests as the waste of the sacrifices were treated. In verse 4, what did God require the priests to preserve?

In verse 5, was God talking about Levi, the son of Jacob, or was he talking about the priests who were descendants of Levi? What was God's covenant with Levi? See Numbers 25:11-13 and Numbers 18:7-8. What did God give to Levi as part of the covenant? For the priests' part, what did God require them to do?

Based on verse 6, what was true of the model priest? In verse 7, what was required of the priests? If the priests did what God required, how would the people respond to them?

How are priests and prophets similar? How are they different? (2:7)

In verse 8, what were God's three charges against the priests?

God found the priests guilty of breaking his covenant. What was the punishment for their crimes against God? (2:9)

Sometimes people say that doctrine is not important. Why is doctrine important? What is the result of false doctrine?

Read Malachi 2:10-16.

This section starts out differently from the rest. Instead of starting with an assertion by God, the section starts with some questions. In verse 10, who is asking the questions? God, Malachi or the people? What are the three questions? What is the purpose of the questions?

Based on verse 11, what is God's charge against Judah?

In verse 12, what is the sentence for their crime against God?

Who are some famous Israelites, from the Old Testament, who married foreign women? What happened as a result?

What is God's assertion against Judah in verse 13?

What was the people's question in response to God's charge? How did God respond to their question? (2:14)

What is taught about marriage in verse 15? As a result of God's design for marriage, what were the people exhorted to do at the end of verse 15?

Verse 16 has two main translations that produce very different meanings. The ESV has "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says Yahweh". NASB and many other translations have something like "For I hate divorce, says Yahweh". Which translation do you think is best? How do the different translations change the interpretation?

Compare God's teaching on marriage and divorce with our current culture's laws and beliefs on marriage and divorce.

Malachi 2:17-3:6 – The Messiah is Coming

The people of Malachi's time refused to acknowledge God's love for them. The priests offered unauthorized sacrifices and showed that they despised God's name. The people married foreign women and divorced their Jewish wives. After God rebuked the people for these sins, the people had the nerve to say that God wasn't acting with justice.

Read Malachi 2:17-3:6.

God said that the people wearied him with their words. What did the people say in response to God's accusation? What did the people say about God's justice? (2:17)

The people wanted to know "where is the God of justice". Why is it dangerous to ask for God's justice?

In response to the people's cry for justice, what did God say he would do? Who was the messenger who would prepare the way before God? (3:1a) See Matthew 11:7-10 and Luke 1:76.

Who was going to come after the messenger who prepared the way? Where was he going to appear? (3:1b)

Two different titles are given to the Messiah. What are those two titles and what is their significance? The word "Lord" is not in small caps. This is not the name "Yahweh". It is a word commonly translated as "lord" or "master". It is used of someone in authority over others. It is sometimes used to refer to God. It is sometimes used to refer to a king. It can also refer to the master of a household. (3:1b)

In verse 1, does the prophetic announcement refer to Christ's first coming, his second coming or both? Which temple would the Messiah enter? Is this referring to a physical temple or a spiritual temple?

The people cried for justice so, in response, God promised to send the Messiah? What was God's challenge to the people who would see the Messiah? The people generally expected the Messiah to come and deliver them from their political enemies. How does this verse expose the people's incorrect expectations? (3:2)

How is the Messiah like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap? What was the primary purpose of Jesus' first coming? Was there judgment involved in Jesus' first coming? If so, explain. Who were often the objects of Jesus' condemnation? (3:2-3)

What would be the result of the Messiah's refining process? How was this prophecy fulfilled? See 1 Peter 2:5 and Romans 12:1. (3:3-4)

The people wanted judgment and justice. What did God promise them in verse 5? What is the significance of the specific sins mentioned?

Does verse 5 refer to Christ's first coming, his second coming or both?

God declared that he does not change. How did this fact result in Jacob not being consumed?

How did the people imply that God had changed?

How many times have parents heard their children say "that's not fair"? The people of Israel accused God of not being fair. Do we accuse God of not being fair? Why do we question God's justice? "That's not fair" is often the objection people have to God's sovereign election based solely on his good pleasure and not on our works. It has often been pointed out, the question is not "why does God save some and not others" but "why does God save any of us". We are all deserving of God's judgment and wrath because of our sin. Only by God's grace are we saved. The people of Malachi's time wanted justice. God would give them justice but he also promised them grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

Malachi 3:7-12 – Robbing God

The people of Judah in the time of Malachi didn't acknowledge God's love for them. They offered unacceptable sacrifices. They were unfaithful to one another and to God in their marriage relationships. They unwisely questioned God's justice. God's next accusation against the people of Judah was that they were robbing him.

Read Malachi 3:7-12.

In verse 7 God made an accusation against Judah and then he gave them an exhortation and a promise. What accusation did God make against Judah? What exhortation did God give to Judah? What promise did God give to Judah?

How did the people respond to God? (3:7)

What specific accusation did God make against Judah in verse 8?

How did the people respond to God's accusation? (3:8)

God got more specific. How were the people robbing God? (3:8)

What was the result of their robbing God? (3:9)

Who was involved in robbing God? How widespread was this problem? (3:9)

What did God command the people to do at the beginning of verse 10?

There was a spiritual need for tithing but there was also a practical need for tithing. Why was tithing important for the people of Judah, the Levites and the priests? See also Nehemiah 13:10-12. (3:10)

God challenged the people to put him to the test. What blessings would God give the people if they brought to God the full tithe? (3:10-12)

If Judah obeyed, how would the nations respond? (3:12)

Is the challenge and promise of verses 10-12 applicable to us today? How have you heard these verses used? Have you heard someone challenge people to send in seed money of one thousand dollars and tell the givers that they would receive much more back from God? Is this a proper use of this passage? Why or why not?

Did Jesus tithe? Are Christians required to give a tenth of what they have to God?

What did the Old Testament require concerning tithing? See Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21-32, Deuteronomy 12:10-19, 14:22-29, 26:12-15.

What are the New Testament principles of giving? See 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, Philippians 4:14-20, James 1:17.1

Malachi 3:13-4:6 – The Day is Coming

In Malachi 2:17, the people of Judah asked “where is the God of justice”. In the verses for tonight, they once again questioned God’s justice and righteousness. God answered their first call for justice by telling them that the God of justice would come to them and that they would not be able to endure his just judgments. God responded to their second complaint about justice by telling them that a day was coming when all evildoers would be burnt to stubble.

Read Malachi 3:13-4:3.

In verse 13, God said that the people of Judah had spoken hard words against him. They of course responded, “who, us?” “How did we do that?” In verses 14 and 15, what were the people saying about God. What were they saying about those who follow God and those who don’t?

In verse 16, what did the people who feared Yahweh do? How did Yahweh respond to the people who feared him? (3:16)

What did God say would be true of the people who feared him? What is meant by “my treasured possession”? When will/did God “make up” his “treasured possession”? (3:17)

How would the people react when they witnessed God’s special treatment of those who fear him? (3:18)

How do verses 3:16-18 refute the charge that it doesn’t profit a person to fear and serve God?

In 4:1, God talked about a day that was coming. Which day is God talking about? How is the day described? What will happen to the arrogant and all evildoers? How does this verse refute what the people were saying about God in 3:14-15?

In that day, what would be true of those who feared God? What does the phrase “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” mean? (4:2-3)

It can be frustrating to see evildoers go unpunished for their sin. In this world, sometimes the innocent are thrown into prison and sometimes murderers go free. What is our comfort when this happens?

Read Malachi 4:4-4:6.

Why did God exhort the people of Judah to remember the Law of Moses? (4:4)

What is the “great and awesome day of Yahweh”? (4:5)

According to verses 4:5-6, what will happen before that day? Who is Elijah? Is it the prophet Elijah who was taken up into heaven? Is it someone “in the spirit and power” of Elijah?

What will Elijah do? (4:5-6)

Malachi 4:6 is quoted in Luke 1:17? What is the context of Luke 1:17?

Malachi points out a number of sins which the priests and the people of Israel were committing. But in the midst of God’s pronouncement of judgment, God also promised to visit his people in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was full of grace and true. Malachi 1:2 stated, “I have loved you.” God proved his love by sending his only begotten Son.

What did you learn from the book of Malachi?

Malachi Review

I Have Loved You. 1:2-5

God loved the descendants of Jacob and had entered into a special covenant relationship with them. The people didn't feel that God loved them because their lives were not as easy and wonderful as they wanted them to be. Their doubt of God's love led to disobedience which in turn led to other problems. For us, God the Father showed his love by sending his only begotten Son. God the Son showed his love for his sheep by laying down his life for them. We love God because he first loved us. But if we doubt God's love for us we are going to have problems.

The Priests Despised God's Name. 1:6-2:9

The priests allowed sacrifices to be offered which God said should not be offered. They offered animals which were blind, lame and blemished. The priests not only needed to offer sacrifices but they needed to do in the way God commanded. God told them that if they were not going to do it the right way he would rather that they didn't do it at all. The sin sacrifices pointed to Christ's death on the cross to make atonement for sin. To offer blemished sacrifices to God was to imply that God had low standards. That was a blatant falsehood. God is holy, just and righteous. That is why the sacrifices needed to be without blemish. Another reason was that the unblemished sacrifice was a type of Christ. Jesus was without sin. He was the fulfillment of the unblemished, perfect sacrifice. The type needed to be strictly followed because of what it taught about the One who fulfilled it.

The Covenant of Marriage was Broken. 2:10-16

The people of Judah were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying foreign women. They were harming one another and also disobeying God. The danger in marrying foreign women was that the husband might be influenced to worship foreign idols. Marriage is also a type of Christ and his bride, the Church. It was important for the type to be preserved. Christ will not abandon and break covenant with his church as some of the men of Judah were doing with their wives.

Where is the God of Justice? 2:17-3:6

The people wanted to know "where is the God of justice." They wanted God to come and punish "those people over there" that they didn't like. They didn't want God to come and judge themselves. God said that he was coming and that the people of Judah would not like it because he was coming to judge them. He would judge the priests and Levites as well as the people of Judah. In this promise of judgment and justice, God promised to send a messenger who would prepare his way. Then the Lord would come to his temple. John the Baptist was the messenger who prepared the way. The Son of God was the one who came to his temple. There was judgment in Jesus' first coming but he was also full of grace and truth. He came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For those who believe in Jesus, there is eternal life. For those who do not believe, there is a terrible judgment.

You are Robbing God in Tithes and Offerings. 3:7-12

The people were not bringing their full tithes into the storehouses in Jerusalem. The priests and Levites lived off this tithe since they did not have an inheritance of land like the other tribes did. While the priests and Levites were busy attending to the temple, they did not have time to sow, weed, and reap crops. They depended on the tithes brought to Jerusalem. If the tithes were lacking, then the service at the temple suffered. God challenged them to obey his commandment to tithe. Disobedience brought a curse. Obedience brought blessing.

It is Vain to Serve God. 3:13-4:3

The people said that it didn't do any good to serve God. They weren't being rewarded for their efforts. They said that it was better to be evil because God didn't punish evildoers. There was a group of people who feared God and came together and distanced themselves from those who accused God of being unjust. God promised that he would punish the wicked and reward those who feared him. This promise finds its fulfillment in both Jesus' first coming and in his second coming. John the Baptist was the one who came in the "spirit and power of Elijah". He prepared the way for Jesus' first coming. He told the people to repent and proclaimed that the one coming after him was greater. Verses 4:5-6 end the book of Malachi and the Old Testament but they make a fitting introduction to the New Testament. The Messiah is coming!