

Synopsis of Malachi

(With Spiritual Lessons)

Historical Setting

It will help to look at the main dates and events relating to the Jewish Remnant, from the time of their return from Captivity, to the time of Malachi:

- B. C. 536. At the decree of Cyrus, 50, 000 return to Judea under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1 and 2).
- B. C. 534. The foundations of the new temple are laid (Ezra 3)-but the rebuilding is hindered and delayed.
- B. C. 520. Ministry of prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Temple rebuilding resumed (Ezra 5; Haggai 1: 15).
- B. C. 516. Temple completed (Ezra 6: 15) twenty years after the return of the 50, 000.
- B. C. 457 Return of a further 1, 800 (plus wives, daughters, and servants under Ezra (Ezra 7).
- B. C. 445. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem by royal edict, as Governor, to rebuild the city (Nehemiah 2).
- B. C. 430 (approx.). Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after long absence. (Nehemiah 13: 6, 7).

Malachi prophesies sometime after this.

The Message of the Book

The remnant of the Jews had been back in the land for almost 100 years. They had fallen into a lethargic and disobedient state. They had become dissatisfied with God and with His dealings with them. They had settled into a religious life, but their hearts were not in it. They were in a complaining attitude toward God. Malachi calls on them to consider their condition and to repent and return to the Lord. He predicts the coming of the Lord in judgment.

It is very important to remember that Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord did not send a messenger to His people until approximately 400 years later when John the Baptist came on the scene.

I will give two outlines of the book, one very simple, and the other more detailed:

This simple outline is from Explore the Book by J. Sidlow Baxter:

Appeal A-In View of the Present Sin (Chapters 1, 2)

The Lord speaks: an appeal to the priests (1: 6-2: 9).

Malachi the speaker: an appeal to the people (2: 10-17)

Appeal B-In View of the Coming Day of the Lord (Chapters 3, 4)

The Day Will Judge the Guilty (3: 1-6) therefore an appeal (vs. 7-12)

The Day Will Bless the Godly (3: 13-4: 3) therefore an appeal (4: 4-6).

The more complete outline is from The New Geneva Study Bible:

- I. Israel Doubts God's Love for Them (1: 1-5).
- II. Degeneration of the Priesthood (1: 6-2: 9)
 1. Contempt for God at the altar (1: 6-14).

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2. Neglect of God's law (2: 1-9)
- III. Israel's Failure in Marriage Practices (2: 10-16)
 1. Marriage to Idolatrous Wives (2: 10-12)
 2. Divorce of Israelite Wives (2: 13-16)
- IV. God's Response to Sin (2: 17-3: 5)
 1. The Guilty Weary God With Excuses (2: 17)
 2. The Purifying Work of the Messenger (3: 1-5)
- V. God's Desire to Bless (3: 6-12)
 1. His Unchanging Promise to Forgive the Repentant (3: 6, 7)
 2. Israel Robs God (3: 8-12)
- VI. Distinction Between the Righteous and the Wicked (3: 13-4: 6)
 1. The Harsh Words and Attitudes of the Cynical (3: 13-15)
 2. The Godly Conduct of the Faithful (3: 16-18)
 3. The Day of the Lord (4: 1-6)

A Sevenfold Complaint

An interesting feature of this book is that the Jews complained to God seven distinct times. In fact, they complained about God. James Montgomery Boice writes about this phenomenon in the following words: "Perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, Malachi describes that modern attitude of mind that considers man superior to God and that has the audacity to attempt to bring God down to earth and measure him by the yardstick of human morality."

We will look at these seven challenges to God. In each of them the word "how" (in the Hebrew) is used. In our KJV the word "wherein" is used 6 times and the word "what" is used once. In every one of these seven cases it expresses a state of mind that challenges God's statements. The idea is a demand that God give an accounting of Himself in human terms.

These seven challenges are found in:

- 1: 2
- 1: 6
- 1: 7
- 2: 17
- 3: 7
- 3: 8
- 3: 13

What Can We Learn From Malachi?

To begin this section I would like to quote a paragraph from the New Geneva Study Bible:

Malachi spoke to a disillusioned, discouraged, and doubting people whose experience did not

harmonize with their understanding of the glorious promises found in the earlier prophets. Their vision of the coming messianic age did not materialize. Instead they experienced poverty, drought, and economic adversity, and they became disillusioned with God and their faith. Malachi's word confronts a people skeptical of the promises and therefore indifferent in their commitment to live in the light of those promises and to worship and serve the Lord with all their hearts. The book may serve as a catechism for times of doubt and disappointment when the professing people of God are tempted to break faith with their covenant God. The prophet's ministry is to light the lamp of faith in a disheartened people by reminding them of God's electing love (1: 2) and to set forth the continuing obligations of the covenant to those who truly know God (3: 16-18).

It is encouraging to note that even in a time of apostasy God still had His remnant or those we might call the "faithful few." The Lord had to remind Elijah of this in another time of wide-spread falling away. He did this in 1 Kings 19:18, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." The apostle Paul said the same thing in his day: Romans 11:2-5, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

When things go wrong we need to trust God and ask Him to increase our faith. Several verses of Scripture are very relevant here:

Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him."

Job 23:9-12, "On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

Psalms 27:13, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Some Highlights from Malachi

John Gill writes that "The general design of it is to reprove the Jews for their ingratitude to the Lord, their neglect and contempt of his worship, and breach of his laws; and to raise in the minds of the truly godly an expectation of the Messiah, and his forerunner, John the Baptist."

The doctrine of Unconditional Election is taught in 1: 2, 3. See Rom. 9: 13. We should be profoundly grateful for our election to glory and should rejoice in it. See Eph. 1: 3, 4; 1 Thess. 1: 4; Lk. 10: 20.

God is our Father and our Master (Lord). We owe Him honor and reverence-1: 6.

We should offer God the best we can. We must not give Him our leftovers of time, money, etc.-1: 8.

1: 11 shows that the prayers of the saints are compared to incense. This verse also points forward to the spiritual sacrifices of the New Testament. See Ps. 141: 2; 1 Pet. 2: 5; Rev. 5: 8.

God puts a high premium on marriage, and He hates divorce. -2: 14-16.

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3: 1 Foretells the coming of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Christ. See 4: 5 and Matt. 11: 10. Jesus is the Messenger of the Covenant of Grace.

3: 2-5-Christ's coming would be wonderful for His children as He purified them and made them fit to offer sacrifices to Him. His coming would be awful for His enemies.

3: 6-The security of God's children rests in His immutability!

3: 10, 11-God challenges His people to be obedient and to see that He will abundantly bless them in this obedience.

3: 16, 17-God notices and takes pleasure in the remnant of His faithful people who love and serve Him.

4: 1- Speaks of vengeance on the apostate Jewish nation. This vengeance is also a prototype of His vengeance on the wicked at His Second Coming.

4: 2 is a wonderful Messianic prophecy.

4: 6- According to the New Geneva Study Bible, "Repentance and turning to God will be seen in the restoration of family relationships. (Luke 1: 17)" John Gill says the sense of this passage is that both the hearts of the fathers and the children shall be turned to Christ.