

Malachi

Key Verse:

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

The first exiles, led by Zerubbabel, returned and built the temple. They were spurred on by the prophets, Zechariah and Haggai (516 B.C.). Then, Ezra came with another group of exiles. He was a Bible teacher, and he strengthened the faith of the struggling returnees.

Then, 13 years later (445 B.C.), the Persian king allowed Nehemiah to return. He rebuilt the walls, instituted reforms to help the poor, and spoke out strongly against mixed marriages. He served as governor. He returned to serve the king of Persia for a time, then came back to Jerusalem. Malachi served his people and proclaimed the word of God around this time. He agreed with and encouraged the policies of Nehemiah.

Malachi's name means, "my messenger." He makes use of repetition to emphasize his message. He proclaims God's love. Perhaps some of the returnees were having a hard time adjusting to the hardships of pioneering life in a developing country. They needed to be reassured of God's love. He also warns that the great day of the Lord will surely come.

The Prophet closes this last book of the Old Testament by looking forward to the coming of the Lord and his forerunner, John the Baptist.

A LOVE RELATIONSHIP SCORNED

Malachi 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:11

1. "I have loved you" (1-5)

It was hard and discouraging to try to rebuild the land. Suffering made the returned exiles question God's love. Malachi answered their questions. God had showed his love to Israel by choosing them to be his own people. He did not choose the descendants of Esau. Israel indeed suffered: They had been slaves in Egypt; they had been exiled from their homeland; they had lived a hard life in the desert. But God was using all of these things to make them a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. However, the Edomites suffered under the wrath of God; they suffered without meaning or hope.

2. Offer God your best (6-14)

God's people dishonored him by offering to him animals that were crippled or diseased--useless to them. This was not right. Such offerings bring curse, not blessing. However, the prophet

looked beyond them to a time when people of all nations would fear and honor his name and worship him (11,14).

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust your love and to offer to you my heart and my best.

One Word: Bring love and purity to God

A MESSENGER OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY

Malachi 2:1-9

Key Verse: 2:7

1. He must set his heart to honor God (1-3)

Malachi's name means "my messenger." The priests were also God's messengers. God's messenger must set his heart to honor God. If he does not, God's blessing will turn into a curse. God rebuked the priests to help them repent. God wanted the covenant relationship with the Levites to continue.

2. God's covenant of life and peace (4-6)

God ordained the Levites and set them apart to serve him when they stood with Moses in the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32:26,29). Later, God made a covenant with the priest, Phinehas, who defended God's honor (Nu 25:12,13). He walked with God, spoke the truth, and turned many from sin.

3. A priest must be the Lord's messenger (7-9)

But the priests of Malachi's time had turned from God's way and caused the people to stumble by their false teaching.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to honor and fear you in my heart so that I may be a fruitful Bible teacher.

One Word: Because he is a messenger of the Lord

GOD HATES DIVORCE

Malachi 2:10-16

Key Verse: 2:15

1. Breaking faith (10-12)

God's covenant with his people is like a marriage contract. God took Israel as his holy bride when he delivered her from Egypt. He was faithful to her in spite of her unfaithfulness. Israel committed spiritual adultery by worshiping idols and compromising with foreign gods.

2. Guard yourself in your spirit (13-16)

When people are unfaithful to God, the spirit of unfaithfulness spreads to human relationships. Each marriage is established by God because he seeks godly offspring. God himself makes a husband and wife one in flesh and spirit. Men and women who break their marriage vows displease God. Furthermore, God's people should not marry unbelievers. Solomon corrupted Judah by his marriages to foreign women (Neh 13:23-27). Nehemiah and Ezra struggled with this problem. Unfaithfulness begins in the heart. So God commands us to "guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith."

Prayer: Lord, help me to guard myself in my spirit. Help me to keep my heart faithful.

One Word: Do not break faith

WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE?

Malachi 2:17-3:5

Key Verse: 3:1

1. Where is the Lord? (2:17-3:1)

Corruption and injustice were rampant; people called evil good and good, evil. They said, "Where is the God of justice?" They thought that there would be no day of judgment. But the prophet promised that the Lord would surely come. God would send his messenger first, to prepare the way. (John the Baptist) Suddenly God whom they had wearied with their words would appear.

2. Who can endure the day of his coming? (2-5)

When God comes among sinful men, he is like a refiner's fire. We can prepare for his coming only by repenting. He purges sin and unrighteousness from his servant people, and restores them to worship and serve him. When Jesus comes again, he will come as Judge. Sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, those who defraud and oppress the weak, and those who have no fear of God will be burned up in the refiner's fire. Those who repent and accept God's way of forgiveness are refined and purified by the fire.

Prayer: Lord, purify me so that I may welcome Jesus when he comes again.

One Word: He is like a refiner's fire

TEST ME IN THIS

Malachi 3:6-18

Key Verse: 3:10

1. Will a man rob God? (6-9)

God extends to mankind a gracious invitation: "Return to me and I will return to you." How can we return? We can take a step toward God by bringing to him our tithes. We thus acknowledge his ownership of our lives. Abraham offered a tithe to Melchizedek and thus pledged his total allegiance to God Most High (Ge 14). We must come to God with repentant hearts, bringing our tithes as our acknowledgment that we and all we have belong to him.

2. I will throw open the floodgates of blessing (10-18)

God invites people to test him. He will bless those who bring their tithes to him with so much blessing that they will not have room to hold it. But he will punish those who rob him, those who have no fear of God in their hearts. He will make a distinction between those who serve God and those who do not.

Prayer: Lord, you made me and redeemed me; I belong to you. I believe that you bless those who come to you acknowledging your ownership of life.

One Word: Don't rob God; test him in this

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL RISE

Malachi 4:1-6

Key Verse: 4:2a

1. The day of the Lord (1-3)

In the perspective of the future, the first and second comings of the Christ are viewed as one event. The world will burn like a furnace on the day of God's righteous wrath, the day of judgment. All proud people and all evildoers will be set on fire like hay stubble in a field. But the Messiah will rise like the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings. He will spread his wings of protection and healing over all those who revere his name. In that day, God's people will leap like calves released from the stall and join in trampling down the wicked.

2. Elijah will come (4-6)

Before the Christ comes, the forerunner must come. The Lord promised to send one like Elijah, the great prophet of Ahab's day, who called a corrupt and idolatrous people to repent and turn to God. The angel who announced the birth of John the Baptist used the words of verse 6. (See Lk 1:17.)

Prayer: Lord, teach me to revere your name, so that I may rest under your healing wings.

One Word: With healing in his wings