

12. Malachi

Introduction

The temple was completed under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Zechariah in 516 B.C. But almost 100 years had passed, and whatever reforms had been instituted were being ignored and spiritual apathy had set in. The people were disregarding the priests and the temple, they were not bringing their tithes and offerings and there was intermarriage with foreigners and divorce taking place.

Malachi is sent to rebuke the people for their sin.

There are a couple of ways one could organize the material in Malachi. Some divide the book into three giant chiasms. (Ray Clendendon, Paper at ETS, Fall 94). Some focus on the seven rhetorical questions in the book. Although I think the chiasm works, for understanding the message of the book, I think it is better to focus on those questions which are designed to convict Israel of her spiritual indifference and cause the people to return to God.

The book begins with the statement by Malachi that God loves Israel (vs 1). The people respond with the question:

How Have You Loved Us? (1:2-5)

This question is deplorable. They don't know? Let's look at how God had loved Israel.

GOD'S LOVE FOR JACOB (1:2)

God loved Jacob over Esau. When it says God "loved" Jacob, you could read it as saying God "chose" Jacob. The Hebrew word *bh@a** (*a*h@b*), translated here as love, has more of an emphasis on choice or election than on emotion, although emotion is involved.

We usually think of love as some warm, fuzzy feeling that we have toward someone, but that is not true love. When I first told my wife that I loved her, she asked me what I meant by that. After all, it was only our third date. My answer was that it meant I was committed to that relationship. I had decided that she was the right one. I had made a choice, and I was going to do whatever

was necessary to make the relationship work. I can't say my decision was not based partly on emotion, but I had made it to my senior year in college without telling any of the other girls I had dated that I loved them. With Lori, I knew right away that she was the one. I remember the conscious decision of commitment.

In the same way, God had chosen Jacob and He was committed to building a relationship with Jacob. God didn't have some warm fuzzy feeling for Jacob. God just decided that He would use Jacob and would do whatever it took to bring Jacob around to Him.

When did God choose Jacob? The choice took place in the womb, so Jacob certainly couldn't have done anything to have deserved it. In fact, as you study the life of Jacob, he epitomizes the independent man trying to control his own destiny and live life without God. God worked on Jacob for many years before Jacob finally turned to God.

GOD'S HATRED FOR ESAU (1:3-5)

In the same way that the word for love emphasized choice, the word "hate" emphasizes the idea of not being chosen or rejection more than an emotion like anger. Esau's descendants epitomize those who despise God's grace (just like Esau despised his birthright). Therefore God judged them. Edom's downfall resulted in God's glorification (vs 5) because it was a testimony to what happens to those who despise and reject God and mistreat God's chosen people.

APPLICATION

Israel is our object lesson. If God's choice of Israel made Israel God's people, then His choice of us makes us His people. He has done the same with us. And we need to remember that God's choice of us is not related to our behavior. It will cause severe emotional problems, such as legalism, guilt, identity crisis, etc. if we do not understand this.

This discussion on God's love for Jacob and hatred for Esau is directly related to the doctrine of predestination. This passage clearly teaches that God chooses some for salvation and others for destruction, and it is through no merit or fault of the individual. At the same time, there are other passages which emphasize human responsibility. So, we have to keep these two ideas in balance.

The rest of the book shows their response to God's love, choice of them, etc.

How Have We Despised Your Name?

(1:6-2:9)

They didn't offer God the same respect they offered their fathers and masters. He uses a lesser-to-greater argument which shows how ridiculous this is. Jesus uses this same type of argument in [Mat 7](#).

THE VIOLATION OF THE COVENANT (1:6-14)

They sacrificed lambs with blemishes which was forbidden in the law. God was to get the best of the crop and flock. But they were giving second rate sacrifices. God was getting the leftovers. Would you serve leftovers to your boss if you invited him over for dinner? Would you give a broken present to someone as a wedding gift? No! It is amazing that we do this to God, when we wouldn't dream of doing it to others. We don't sacrifice anymore but we can relate it to giving of our money and time. Do you give the first part of every check to God? Or does He get what is left over at the end of the month?

1:9 - They want God to be gracious to them, but God will not "receive them kindly" until they change their ways. They are saying they have repented, but they have not changed their ways. If there is true repentance, there will be a change in behavior. This is the same message as [Micah 6:6-8](#), [Hosea 14:1f](#).

1:11 is eschatological. We see yet another reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's kingdom.

Just a quick word search on "gentiles," "peoples" and "nations" revealed the following verses which talk about the Gentiles eventually worshipping Yahweh. [Isa 2:2](#), [2:4](#), [11:10](#), [42:6](#), [43:9](#), [49:6](#), [22](#), [60:3](#), [Jer 3:17](#), [4:2](#), [16:19](#), [Micah 4:1](#), [3](#), [5:7-8](#), [Zeph 3:9](#), [Zech 8:20-22](#), [Mal 1:11](#), [14](#), [3:12](#)

THE VINDICATION OF THE COVENANT (2:1-9)

2:1-9 shows God's response as He keeps His part of the covenant and curses them accordingly. Mixed into this section is a condemnation of the priests who were not instructing the people correctly. They were showing partiality which must mean they were doing things for their own gain and they were causing others to stumble by not teaching correctly. (cf. [Mat 18](#))

For What Reason?

(2:10-16)

In 2:14 Malachi points out that God no longer accepts their offerings and the people want to know why. Therefore, they ask the question, “For what reason.” The reasons begin in 2:10.

MIXED MARRIAGES (2:10-12)

This section shows that God did not accept their offerings because they were marrying foreign women. God was their father and the nation had a special unity which was being corrupted.

It was a direct violation of the covenant to marry foreigners, but they were doing it. One reason for the command not to marry foreigners would be to avoid introducing the worship of foreign gods into Israel. Solomon’s wives did that. Jezebel is another classic example. Verse 11 even describes the women as “daughters of a foreign god, so undoubtedly this is in view.

The main reason this was forbidden was because God had chosen Abraham and his offspring as the means of saving the world. In the Abrahamic covenant God said the nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. If everyone intermarried, there would be no distinct ethnic race left through whom God could fulfill his promise. It would be like America where most people are a mixture of several different nationalities and after only 200 years, few know their ancestry. The fact that most Jews are distinctly Jewish and know their lineage is a testimony to how God has set them apart as a distinct people.

In verse 12 Malachi requests that those guilty of intermarriage be “cut off.” Some might try to argue that this is exclusion from the community, but it most likely means that they should be killed. That is the normal meaning of the words. In other words, this was a serious offense. And death was the only solution to the problem. Notice what wasn’t the solution—divorce. In fact it is condemned in the next verses.

DIVORCE (2:13-16)

Verse 13 says they covered the altar with tears and looked sincere, but God would not accept their sacrifices because they were not sincere as illustrated by their actions.

They were getting divorced. Verses 14-16 show that marriage is a covenant witnessed by God and one that should never be broken.

It said in 2:13 that God could not accept their sacrifices. The reason is they were living in sin and the sacrifices were not offerings of repentance for their sin. I think these divorced men were coming to God with sacrifices because things weren’t going very good in their lives. They were

experiencing discipline and they were trying to persuade God to stop. But they were just wooden rituals that meant nothing.

Do we just go to church, read the Bible and ignore our sin? Or are we sorry, desire to quit, and come to God in brokenness.

Verse 15 is impossible to understand. The Hebrew literally says, “and not one he has made and reminder of spirit to him.”

The NASB reads “Not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit.” If this is a good translation, then it means that anyone who gets divorced is not in agreement with the Spirit of God. I’ve heard my pastor say that he has had men come to his office and say that God was leading them to get a divorce. That is not possible.

The NIV reads: “Has not *the LORD* made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”

In keeping with this section’s emphasis on unity (cf. 2:10), the NIV translation gives us another emphasis on maintaining national unity. We’ve already discussed this but it bears repeating: The Messiah was to be of the seed of Abraham. If the Israelites were divorcing their wives and intermarrying with foreigners, this would destroy God’s plan for the nation.

Verse 15 also says, “And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring.” What does that mean? I think he is referring to Abraham’s relations with Hagar. That was not God’s plan for raising a pure nation from which would come the Messiah. Look at the mess that has caused through the centuries. Perhaps Malachi is even saying, “See what happens when you go outside the nation for marriage.”

In verse 16 God says, “I hate divorce.” This is a strong statement. Pastors hate to preach on divorce because it strikes too close to home for so many in the church who have been divorced and people leave the church if they don’t agree with you.

How Have We Wearied Him? **(2:17-3:6)**

The people doubt God's justice in 2:17 because they couldn't see justice coming to the wicked. The Persians were wicked and they were still in power, and certainly, there were Israelites who were wicked and not being punished. We can identify with these sentiments in our culture.

Malachi promises that God will judge the wicked. [Mal 3:1](#) is a promise fulfilled by John the Baptist, and the reference to the Lord coming to His temple is also fulfilled by Jesus at his first advent. Verse 2 is a reference to the second advent when Jesus will come as the judge. Notice the imagery of smelter, purifier, refiner's fire and fullers' soap, etc. The emphasis is on the cleansing and purifying purpose of the second coming. (We mentioned in Zechariah that the Flying scroll's purpose was to purify the land.)

3:6 - God's immutability means He will keep His promises to Israel and will not totally destroy them.

How Shall We Return?

(3:7)

Israel needs to repent and return to God before He can restore them. But they ask how they are to return. He answered that question in the beginning of verse 7 when he said they had not kept His statutes. Return involves obedience. I think the following questions also answer that question.

How Have We Robbed Thee?

(3:8-12)

THE ROBBERY (3:8-9)

One of the ways they were not keeping God's statutes was by withholding their tithes and offerings. It says they were robbing God. This means that not giving is stealing!

THE REMEDY (3:10-12)

God says, If they would be generous in their giving, He would open the floodgates of heaven and blessing would overflow. He would provide all their needs and more. But they were not doing that.

The natural thing to do is spend all our money on ourselves and not leave any for God. When we do that there never seems to be enough.

Why is that? Because when we stop giving to God, it shows our priorities are wrong and we are trying to find happiness in things. Things never satisfy, but we spend all our money on them and even go in debt searching for happiness.

3:11 mentions a devourer. What is that? In that culture it was any pest that came along and ate the plants they were growing. In our day we might relate it to car problems, air conditioners and water heaters that go out, doctor bills, etc. God allows things to come along and use up our money to force us to return to Him.

If our priorities are right and we are seeking happiness in God, then we give to Him faithfully and gratefully, and we find satisfaction in life through relationship with Him. He provides our needs and it is enough.

The issue of giving is prevalent in Scripture. [2Co 8-9](#)

- Giving is a manifestation of God's grace (vs 1)
- Giving can be done in the midst of tough times (vs 2)
- Giving is a privilege (vs 4)
- Giving involves one's self before one's stuff (vs 5) [If I give myself, my wallet follows.]
- Giving is proof of one's love (vs 8)
- God's blessing is proportionate to one's giving (9:6, 8)
- Giving should be voluntary and from a cheerful heart (9:7)
- Giving glorifies God before others as tangible testimony to the gospel (9:12)

Giving is other-centered. Not giving is self-centered. Here we have yet another prophet condemning the people for a lack of love.

What Have We Spoken Against Him? (3:13-15)

Malachi condemns the people because their words had been harsh or hard against Yahweh. The word for "harsh" is the same one used to describe Pharaoh's heart in [Ex 7:13,22](#). They had become stubborn. Their question, "What have we spoken against Thee?" was not a searching, repentant question, it was a protest.

THE ARROGANCE OF THE PEOPLE (3:14-15)

What had they been saying? Verse 14 says they were tired of *serving* God for it brought no material prosperity, while those who ignored God were prospering and not suffering any

discipline from God. They were playing religion for their own gain. They were putting themselves first and not God.

THE ASSURANCE OF GOD (3:16-18)

God's response is that He keeps a book of remembrance which means He does not forget those who fear and serve Him. "On that day" justice will come on the wicked, but the righteous would be spared. Over and over again we see the need to live faithfully now and look to the future for our reward. It goes against our basic nature to do that. It requires that we believe in something we can't see. It takes faith. Our tendency is to want to get our reward now. We want to be appreciated for the what we do for others. It is unnatural to give anonymously. It is supernatural when we do so without second thoughts.

When he says "on that day," he is talking about the Day of the Lord. This leads us into the next section.

The Day of the Lord (4:1-6)

This Day of the Lord is the same day spoken of in [Zephaniah 1:14](#) and [Joel 2:31](#). Although it finds its partial fulfillment in every judgment of God on evil, the primary fulfillment will occur at the second coming of Christ.¹

Malachi emphasizes that God is concerned with both attitudes (the arrogant) and actions (the evildoers) and the judgment on both will be complete because "it will leave neither root nor branch." The condemnation of the arrogant in 4:1 is directly aimed at the arrogant in 3:13. They were complaining that the evildoers were not getting their due, and God warns them that not only will the evildoers get it, so will they with their bad attitudes.

Some say that verse 3 indicates that the righteous will participate in the judgment, but I'm not sure that is required. It could be saying that the righteous will walk on the ashes that are left over from the judgment. The reason I say this is I believe the church will participate, but not OT believers. They are not resurrected until after the Tribulation and second advent.

Conclusion (4:4-6)

The last three verses summarize Malachi's message. Verse 4 exhorts the people to follow the law of Moses. If they had been, they would have been tithing, not intermarrying, not getting

divorced, etc. Verses 5-6 give a promise for the future. Verse 5 promises that God would send Elijah the prophet to announce the arrival of Day of the Lord. Verse 6 says that his ministry will be to restore the hearts of the fathers (probably a reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to the children (Israelites living when Elijah comes). If the children don't respond, God would smite the land with a curse. This prophecy was partially fulfilled by John the Baptist who came to announce the Day of the Lord was at hand and to call the people to repentance. But the nation rejected Jesus and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.

Notice what the last word of the OT is — “curse.” What a way to end. It leaves you hanging, anticipating, searching for resolution. And the resolution would come in the Messiah.

Summary

- God affirms love for Israel, but the first question shows the people's skepticism and doubt that God loved them.
- The second question focuses on the neglect of priests and people who brought second rate sacrifices.
- The third question showed how their bad relationship with God carried over into the community through the practice of divorce and remarriage to foreigners.
- The fourth question showed that the people mistook God's patience for lack of divine justice.
- The fifth question showed that their tithes and offerings were affected by their attitudes.
- The sixth question demonstrates their arrogance and shortsightedness in neglecting a God honoring lifestyle.
- The section on the Day of the Lord promises judgment will come on the wicked and salvation to the righteous.
- The conclusion exhorts them to obey the law and wait for Elijah who would announce the day of the lord.

Application

God's grace is emphasized in the beginning of the book by his choice of Jacob. We too have been chosen by God. Just as Jacob did not deserve to be chosen, neither do we deserve to be chosen. When we don't recognize that and think we do deserve it, that is arrogance, and it results in a lack of worship. Our sacrifices become second rate, our giving decreases, human relationships degenerate and we start comparing our material status in life with the ungodly people around us who prosper and we think we have wasted our lives being “devoted” to God.

The fact is that we are not truly devoted to God. The reason we are not devoted is we don't appreciate the grace of God.

The grace of God and the message of Malachi have an interesting parallel in the NT. In [Titus 2:11-13](#) Paul says:

- Verse 11 - appreciate the grace of God
- Verse 12 - live godly lives
- Verse 13 - look forward to the coming of the Lord.
- The message of Malachi is definitely relevant today.

Chiastic Structure of Malachi

FIRST ADDRESS:

Motivation - God's Love 1:1-5

Situation - Failure to honor God 1:6-9

Change - Stop Vain offerings 1:10

Situation - Profaning God's name 1:11-14

Motivation - God's Discipline 2:1-9

SECOND ADDRESS:

Motivation - Spiritual Unity 2:10a

Situation - Faithless 2:10c-15b

Change - Be Faithful 2:15c-16

Situation - Hypocrisy and Injustice 2:17

Motivation - Coming Messiah 3:1-6

THIRD ADDRESS:

Change - Return 3:7-10b

Motivation - Future Blessing 3:10c-12

Situation - Rejection and Complacency 3:13-15

Motivation - Coming Day 3:16-21

Change - Remember Torah - 3:22-24

The third address switches pattern for surprise and emphasis. It is most prominent because there are two “change” elements and the changed order and because it is last. And there is the longest speech of Judah. Marked by inclusio - bWv .

Note the positive and negative motivations in the above motivation sections.