

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

p. 1

Message #1

Malachi 1:1

Many of us are interested in last episodes or the final episode of something. For example, in 1975, after 635 episodes, the TV series Gunsmoke came to an end with the story called “The Sharecroppers.” It was the last time Milburn Stone, who played Doc, ever appeared on TV. The last episode of Leave it to Beaver was in 1963 and was called “Family Scrapbook.” When you know it is the last episode you want to watch it and see it.

In 1957, the show “I Love Lucy” came to an end. It was the number 1 rated show on TV when it ended in 1957. But in spite of its high ratings and in spite of its huge success, it came to an end. The reason why it ended was summed up this way by one historian: “One of the biggest reasons that I Love Lucy ended was because the marriage of Lucille Ball and Desi was crumbling.” One of the production people on set said they could not get through a scene without yelling at each other.

The last episode and book in the English Bible Old Testament is a book named Malachi. It is the last prophetic message God gives His people before He closes the Old Testament. It is not only the last book of the Old Testament, but it is also the last of the Twelve Minor Prophet books. **In fact, no one will hear from God again for about the next 450 years.**

Malachi was written about 450 years before Jesus Christ was born and it was the last message God gave to His people. It would be the last time God’s people would hear from Him for a long, long time. Why? The marriage between God and Israel was broken. The relationship was a mess. So God went silent for the next several hundred years.

Just this fact that it is the last book of the Old Testament peaks our interest. It makes us want to see it and study it. Since God knew He was not going to speak again for the next 400 years plus, what would He say? How would the O.T. end? What would His final O.T. message actually be?

What makes this book even more intriguing is that it was written in a time when the world was experiencing a real moral decline and a real religious decline. Oh, people were physically and financially prospering and so was religion. The Temple was back up but the people were backslidden. The spirituality of the people was pathetic.

This is just like our day. What would God say to a people like that? What would His final message to them be? You may be surprised has to how relevant this book really is. In the next weeks, we would like to take you through Malachi:

QUESTION #1 – Why study Malachi?

We give eight reasons for our study of this book:

Reason #1 - Malachi is an inspired book of God and there are only 66 inspired books in existence.

There are 55 verses in the book of Malachi and God is specifically named at least 53 times in those 55 verses. He is referred to as **LORD** - sovereign Covenant God of Israel who can do what He wants; He is referred to as **God** - sovereign Creator of all things; He is referred to as **Lord** - Sovereign controller over all things and He is referred to as the "**LORD of hosts**" more times in this book than any other book of the Old Testament (1:4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 7, 8, 16; 3:12, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17; 4:1, 3). This title means God is in sovereign Charge of all powers and armies in heaven and on earth. Over and over again, Malachi emphasizes this is what the Lord says. This book claims from verses 1-2 that this is the word of God.

Stephen Miller, in his commentary, said, "Malachi's status as a book of God has never been questioned" (*Malachi*, p. 310). Robert Alden said Malachi "is found in all the authoritative enumerations of the canonical books" (*Malachi*, p. 706).

A fragment of Malachi was found in 1952 in the Qumran Caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This was found in Qumran Cave #4 (4Q12) and was found not including all twelve minor prophets. The fragment included Malachi 2:10-4:6. This shows that this was carefully protected as its own manuscript. Plus the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew into Greek in 250 BC, is a close word for word translation of the Hebrew Text, proving it is a carefully copied and preserved book of God. In AD 895 a Hebrew vowel pointed text was found in Cairo that contained Malachi. Another was found in AD 1000 in Leningrad.

Malachi is a book that is referred to multiple times in the New Testament as being inspired prophecy (Matt. 11:10; 17:12; Mark 1:2; 9:11-12; Luke 1:17; Rom. 9:13). Clearly Malachi is one of the rare inspired books of God and we are going to study it.

Reason #2 - Malachi was written in a time when most of God's people were experiencing a moral, social and spiritual decline.

The Apostle Paul made it very clear that the O.T. Scriptures were written for our instruction (I Cor. 10:11) and are profitable to thoroughly develop our spirituality (II Tim. 3:16).

This book was written at a time when God's people had great freedom. Things were good, but spiritually speaking, things were anything but good. There was a real decline in spirituality. People were living loose and free. They lacked discipline and true Biblical righteousness.

In other words, it was written in a time just like ours. People have a lot of freedom, but they sure aren't using it for the glory of God.

What would God say to these people? What would God's last message be? We need to see it and understand it because it has the potential of turning things around.

Reason #3 - Malachi is a book that clearly reveals God loves His people.

It is immediately clear when this book begins that God has a message for Israel and that He loves Israel. God loves His people and that includes us. God's people need to realize that God's love is a distinguishing type of love. In fact, this is a key theme that opens the book - Malachi 1:2. God loves His people in ways He does not love the rest of the world.

God's people were obviously doubting or questioning, not thinking right on the subject of God's love for them.

God's people need to know the truth of God's love. What most people don't understand about the love of God is that **God's love is consistent with and contains God's warnings and God's judgment.**

God's love is not a love of total toleration in that He doesn't care what His people believe and do. True love that is like God's love is a love that confronts, condemns and consults. God's love is anything but a total toleration kind of love. These people were living loose and free and weren't real serious about God's word and righteousness and they were questioning God's love.

Reason #4 - Malachi is a book that teaches how God's people should respond to God's love.

In view of God's love, God's people need hearts right with God. God's people have a responsibility to honor God (1:6; 2:1); to reverence God (2:5); to stand in awe of God (2:5); to fear God (3:16); to serve God (3:18). God's people should want to be taught God's word (2:7).

In view of the fact that God loves His people, they should be serious about Him and His word. They should honor Him, serve Him, offer Him their best and worship Him. They should not be questioning God all the time and doubting God and debating with God.

God's people can drift from a right focus. They can start questioning God about justice and lose sight of their own spirituality that isn't right (2:17).

Reason #5 - Malachi is a book that demands God's leaders be faithful.

This is so important. It is possible for leaders to actually go through all the religious motions and not really have hearts right with God. There is a big difference between religious formalism and real spirituality. God's leaders need to be faithful in their hearts.

This is not a nice little suggestion; this is a very serious warning. God demands faithfulness in leaders. He expects His leaders to give true instruction from His word to the people (Mal. 2:6-7) and He expects His leaders to honor Him (2:1-2). Leaders have the potential of leading people into the blessings of God and they also have the potential to lead them away from the blessings of God and into the cursing and chastisements of God.

Reason #6 - Malachi is a book of prophetic predictions concerning the first and second Coming of Jesus Christ (3:1-6).

There are several prophetic references to future things in this book: 3:2, 17; 4:1, 3, 5. God promises that He will cause wonderful things to happen in the future to His people.

In fact, it is only in Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6 and Isaiah 40:3 do we learn that the Messiah will be introduced by a forerunner. Jesus Christ specifically quoted Malachi in pointing out that John the Baptist was a fulfillment of that prophecy (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2). Luke also researched the life of Jesus Christ and he quoted the same thing (Luke 1:76).

We also learn that before Jesus Christ comes a second time, one of the prophets that will reappear will be Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6). We believe that in the Great Tribulation, Elijah will literally appear in Jerusalem just exactly as Malachi predicts.

Reason #7 - Malachi is a book that reveals that God has a written list of names of people who feared Him, esteemed Him and served Him and He will honor them.

3:16-18

It is revealed in many different passages of Scripture that God keeps written records pertaining to every human. God keeps records of people in regard to their sin and their relationship with Him. God knows and names all of His people who are faithful. Their names are recorded in a book and there will come a day when they will be honored for having their name in the book.

In the Bible there are four books:

- 1) Book of Life or Lamb's book of life for all those who do believe in Jesus Christ.
(Revelation 20:12)
- 2) Book of condemnatory works for all those who do not believe in Jesus Christ.
(Revelation 20:12)
- 3) Book of Rejection of Life for all those who reject the way of life (Jeremiah 17:13).
- 4) Book of Remembrance for all believers who will be remembered for faithfulness.

Malachi 3:16

This book of Remembrance shows up in Malachi. This is the book one wants to be in.

Reason #8 - Malachi is a book that asks probing questions.

It is a book filled with inspired questions. There are about 25 total questions that are asked in this book. Both God and Malachi will ask a question inspired by God and then he will respond with a response of the people and their ridiculous questions: 1:2, 6, 6, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 9, 9, 13; 2:10, 10, 14, 17, 17; 3:2, 2, 7, 8, 8, 13, 14.

In fact, you will notice in:

Malachi 1:1-2:9 - God asks questions and speaks in the first person "I."

Malachi 2:10-2:15 - Malachi asks questions and speaks in the first person plural "we."

Malachi 2:16-4:6 - God asks questions and speaks in the first person "I."

God will show the foolishness of His own people by asking a question or making a statement and then following it up with some ridiculous or sarcastic response the people have such as “but you ask” or “but you say.”

Life is filled with all kinds of questions and the key to a blessed life is having the right answers. Right answers come from God’s word. Malachi is a book that asks questions, but it also gives right answers.

QUESTION #2 – Who is Malachi?

Other than what we may discover within the book, which isn’t much, we have no other data about Malachi.

Malachi’s name in Hebrew is “ma lak” (kalm**), which means messenger.** William Gesenius says the name means a sent messenger of God (*Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 475).

By adding an “i” to the end of his name “Malak I,” it may mean “my Messenger” or it may mean “Jehovah’s messenger.” Sometime a suffix “i” at the end of a word was a form of the divine name “Jehovah.”

The word “messenger” shows up without the “i” at the end in 2:7 and 3:1. A sent messenger could be an angel, or a prophet or a priest. **So Malachi was given the name that means “sent messenger.”**

What we know from **verse 1** is that Malachi was a prophet of God and received an oracle from God. The word “oracle” (massah) refers to something that is spoken or uttered that is burdensome in the sense that it puts a load to bear on someone (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 512).

So Malachi got a direct, revelatory burdensome message from God and his responsibility was to write it and communicate it to the people of God.

Probably the reason why we don’t know much about him is because his name means “messenger.” He is a messenger of God and when a messenger comes to deliver a message, typically you don’t ask for parental credentials.

J. Vernon McGee said when some messenger shows up at your door delivering a western union telegram, you typically don’t say to the messenger tell me about your family. What you want is the message (*Malachi*, Vol. 3, p. 990). Malachi is bringing a message from God.

This is what a real minister must be about - communicating the true message of God found in His word. Here is a real problem today.

Ministers are more concerned about bringing their message to the people rather than God's message to the people. If ministers were concerned about that, they would concern themselves with accurately communicating all 66 books of God's inspired word.

QUESTION #3 – When was Malachi written?

There is no specific mention of any king or leader like in some other books that enable us to pinpoint a date. Many assume that it was written around the time of Haggai and Zechariah, which would date it around 515-450 BC.

One reason for dating the book here is that the Temple was standing and people were worshipping and had freedom to worship in Jerusalem and were taking their offerings to the Temple (Mal. 1:10-11; 3:10). Haggai told the people to rebuild the Temple in 520 BC so when Malachi was written, the Temple had been rebuilt.

This fits well into this time frame because Cyrus and Darius had permitted the Jews to be in Jerusalem and actually encouraged them to rebuild the Temple and worship again, which they were obviously doing. They had their houses and they had their worship; they did not have real spirituality.

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme or purpose of Malachi?

In 586 BC, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. In 538 B.C., Cyrus, the King of Persia, conquered Babylon and gave permission to all the Jewish exiles to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple and establish their homes.

About 50,000 went back and in their first year back around 536 BC they rebuilt the foundation of the Temple. But due to various threats and intimidations, their work stopped. The people got more interested in working on their own homes than in their worship of God so in 520 BC, under the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, God admonished the people to rebuild the temple and by 515 BC, it was rebuilt.

About 60 years later around 460 BC, Ezra came from Babylon to Jerusalem. He came to help reorganize and teach the people. He was very skilled in his understanding of God's word and he went to Jerusalem to instruct the people (Ezra 7).

Then about 13 years later, in 447 BC, Nehemiah got word that things had deteriorated and he came to rebuild the wall. He discovered there were people threatening the people but that did not stop him and he got the wall completely rebuilt. He completed the project in just 52 days (Neh. 6:15).

In the meantime, as all of these good things were physically happening, the people of God hadn't really blossomed in their relationship with God.

They knew of the truth and they were going to worship services, but their problem was that their hearts were not right with God. In fact, some looked and acted more pagan than they did godly.

Their kingdom had not been established and they were still being dominated by the Persians and the people were questioning God's love for them. They were questioning God's justice. They could not understand why God wasn't completely blessing them. So God sent Malachi to straighten them out. Malachi says your spirituality is superficial. You know a lot about truth and you go to worship, but you have a major heart problem.

God's goal for His people was that they become a kingdom of priests who are blessed by Him in every way. In fact, He will end the book by saying I am going to lift the curse one day and restore My people (4:6).

But His people did not manifest the kind of lifestyle that would cause God to do that.

The religious leaders were not leading people the right way. They had knowledge and they had worship. They had ordinances and they had rituals.

However, the people were not acting like the people of God. They were questioning the value of things and were drifting away from their commitment to the Lord.

They were pursuing that which was immoral and they were not worshipping God with right attitudes and they lost sight of the fact that God needed to be held in high regard. They were hurting economically and were experiencing one disappointment after another.

The relationship God's people have with God is fractured and yet God still loves His people and desires to do good things for His people so His people need to get into a right relationship with God in a variety of situations and contexts of life.

The primary theme here is God calls His leaders and His people to get back to a right heart relationship with Him so He can bless them. God's leaders and people need to upgrade their theology and life and refocus on God.

Stop questioning God's love. Stop questioning God's justice and start focusing on their own spiritual righteousness.