

12. Malachi 450-400 B.C.

The book of Malachi has 4 chapters. It is a Post-Exilic Southern Kingdom book.

Author

Malachi's name occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, nor is any background material provided about him. The Hebrew name "*mal'ak*" means "the Lord's messenger." It is the basic word for *angel*. Malachi is *mal`akhi*. Angel is *mal`akh*. Some have suggested that the name is a designation for an anonymous writer, but that is unlikely, since no other biblical prophetic book has an anonymous author.

Date Written: around 430 B.C.

Background

Beginning in 538 B.C., the Jews started to return to the Land from the Babylonian Captivity. So they had been back in the Land 100 years before Malachi's prophecy. In 516, they finished building the temple (which the Babylonians had destroyed). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 445 to rebuild the wall. This was followed by a time of revival under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:28-39). But the revival had deteriorated into a mechanical ritualistic religion.

Purpose

Malachi parallels the book of Leviticus in that both are concerned with how the people and the priests should act in the temple. In Leviticus, one reads about *how* to worship God. In Malachi, the focus is on the *heart* of those who worship. Malachi wrote the last prophecy of the Old Testament in which he delivered God's message of judgment on Judah for their continuing sin and God's promise that one day in the future, when the Jews would repent, Messiah would be revealed and God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. There was over 400 years of divine silence in the inter-testament time, with only Malachi's words ringing condemnation in their ears, before another prophet arrived with a message from God, who was John the Baptist, preaching, *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!* (Matthew 3:2). **The purpose of Malachi is to tell the returning southern Jews to not replace their heart for God with religious rituals.**

Theme

Subject: Religious routine

Complement: does not honor God

Key Verse

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name (3:16).

MALACHI – "MY MESSENGER"

1: 2-5	1:6-2:9	2:10-16	2:17-3:6	3:7-12	3:13-18	4: 1-6
LOVE	HONOR	FIDELITY	JUSTICE	OBEY	FEAR	DAY OF THE LORD
" I HAVE LOVED YOU"	" WHERE IS MY HONOR"	" YOU HAVE PROFANED THE COVENANT"	" YOU HAVE WEARIED YHWH"	" RE-TURN TO ME"	" YOUR WORDS ARE ARROGANT"	" THE DAY IS COMING"
HOW?	HOW?	WHY?	HOW?	HOW?	WHAT?	

[Chart from guamdaveo.blogspot.com]

Outline

- Introduction:** The Burden of Malachi (1:1)
- First Oracle:** Respond to God’s Love (1:2-5)
- Second Oracle:** Honor God (1:6–2:9)
- Third Oracle:** Keep Your Marriage Covenant (2:10-16)
- Fourth Oracle:** *He is coming* (2:17–3:6)
- Fifth Oracle:** *Return to Me, Pay your tithes* (3:7-12)
- Sixth Oracle:** *Those who feared the Lord* (3:13-18)
- Conclusion:** Be Prepared for God’s Coming (4:1-6)

Commentary

Introduction: The Burden of Malachi (1:1)

The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. As with the other prophets, the revelation came to Malachi in words, not feelings or circumstances or any form of mental telepathy. Notice also that the designation “Israel,” used often of the Northern Kingdom, is now used of the Southern Kingdom.

First Oracle: Respond to God’s Love (1:2-5)

Verses 2-3, *“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”* The contrast here is between the words for *loved* and *hated*. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “love” is not the strong word *hesed* for “loyal love” but the word *ah-hav* (or *ah-hab*) for “affection,” as with a spouse or a close friend. The word for “hate” is *sane* (pronounced emphasizing a long “a”). It is almost always translated *hate*, occasionally, *enemy*. Contextually, it has to do with blessing the Israelites vs. cursing the Edomites, affection for Israel and indignation for Esau. The Apostle Paul deals with it in terms of God choosing Israel and not choosing Esau (Romans 9:10-13). The point is that God showed His affection for Israel by choosing the Jews over the Edomites. Love, in the sense of affection, is always a choice of one over another. To say, “I love everybody” would be the same as not loving anybody. Love always chooses one over another.

Second Oracle: Honor God (1:6–2:9)

The second oracle begins with a theoretical discussion between God and the priests.

Verses 6-8, The LORD of hosts: *“...where is My honor? ...O priests who despise My name.”*

Priests: *“How have we despised Your name?”*

The LORD of hosts: *“You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.”*

Priests: *“How have we defiled You?”*

The LORD of hosts: *In that you say, “The table of the LORD is to be despised. But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not*

evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.

Notice, from the theoretical discussion:

1. The priests are represented as dishonoring God without knowing it. They thought just the ritual of doing the offerings was honoring God, even though they used the lame and sick animals for sacrifice, which would be killed anyway.
2. The Lord’s omniscience extends not only to what they are doing but to their attitude about it.
3. The objective of worship is to give honor to God, not to perform some ritual.

Verse 10, *“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates.”* The Lord is always looking for the one individual who will take a stand for His honor.

Verse 11, *“For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations,”* says the LORD of hosts.

There is disagreement among scholars about when this offering is made. Some take it as a present tense (the Hebrew can mean either “is brought” or “will be brought”). The present tense seems unlikely since the Gentiles were not giving offerings to the Lord, and there is no evidence Jews who were in exile among the nations ever performed sacrifices. Taking it as a future “will be brought” correlates with other Old Testament prophets who predict a future kingdom where Gentiles will become worshipers of the Lord (Isaiah 11:3-4, 9; Daniel 7:13-14, 27-28; Zephaniah 2:11; 3:8-11; Zechariah 14:9, 16).

Verse 13, *“You also say, ‘My, how tiresome it is!’ And you disdainfully sniff at it,”* says the LORD of hosts. The worship of God had become boring and seemed to be unimportant.

Verse 14, *“But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.”* The reason for vows is unclear, possibly as an act of worship or accompanying a prayer request. Making a vow was not required. It is a promise of a future gift. But once a vow was made, its payment was mandatory (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Moses had given the priests detailed rules about what is an acceptable payment of a vow (Leviticus 22:17-25).

Malachi 2:7-9, *“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,”* says the LORD of hosts. *“So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.”* The priests were to be an intermediary between the people and God. Like all believers today (Revelation 1:6), priests were not prophets receiving new revelation from God, but part of their responsibilities, like ours, was to *preserve knowledge*. A priest was to be the kind of man who other *men should seek instruction from his mouth*. The priest should be *the messenger* [it is the word for “angel”] *of the LORD of hosts*.

Third Oracle: Keep Your Marriage Covenant (2:10-16)

Verse 10, *“Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?”* The third oracle begins with a style which is different from the others. This oracle begins with three questions asked by Malachi. The answer to the first two questions is “Yes.” This denies any form of evolution (such as theistic evolution) and leads to the third question based on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters. The point is, the Israelites were dealing treacherously with each other in that they perverted the covenant of marriage in two ways:

1. Verse 11, *“Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god.”* They were marrying foreign wives.

2. Verses 14, 16, *“Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”*... *“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts.* They were divorcing their wives, or otherwise treating them *treacherously* (with betrayal or deception).

An Application: Do not marry an unbeliever and do not get a divorce or otherwise treat your spouse with betrayal or deception.

Fourth Oracle: He is coming (2:17–3:6)

Verse 17, *“You have wearied the LORD with your words.”* Yet you say, *“How have we wearied Him?”* In that you say, *“Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,”* or, *“Where is the God of justice?”* They have committed two additional sins:

First, they called evil, good. We do not know what they were calling good, but in our society, and in many churches, we call homosexuality good when God says it is evil. We say abortion is a woman’s right to choose when God says murder is evil. We say lying is sometimes good when God says it is of the devil. We say divorce and remarriage are good if it makes us happy, when God says He hates it.

Second, they said God did not carry out justice. This may refer to the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, which is an age-old issue (Psalm 73; Job 21). Justice as an attribute of God is proclaimed throughout the Bible. For example, Solomon also understood that *God will bring every act into judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14), even though Solomon did not know how God would do that.

Under the Mosaic Law, God promised a reward or punishment to the nation for obedience here on earth (Deuteronomy 28). So, there is the issue of God’s double commitment: justice for the nation and justice for the individual. As we see from Job and Asaph (referenced above), God did carry out justice for individuals but that was often not explained to the individual, whose short-sightedness could not see it.

An Application: Today we understand that the justice of God is postponed until a final afterlife judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15). This is confusing to people who do not see

the Bible dispensationally, since they might think the suffering or prosperity of someone today is the justice of God.

Verses 3:1-2, *“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,”* says the LORD of hosts. *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.”* Notice again that the text demands a dispensational understanding. God will send His messenger, John the Baptist, and the Lord Jesus Christ will come to His temple. But between Malachi 3:1 and 3:2 is the whole church age, of which the Old Testament prophets, like Malachi, were not aware (Ephesians 3:3-9).

Verse 5, *“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness...”* The final answer to their complaint, that the Lord was not a God of justice, will be answered at the Second Coming of Christ, when God will *draw near to you for judgment*, for example, *“...against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,”* says the LORD of hosts.

Verse 6, *“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”* Oracle Four ends with a statement of the immutability of God. The wonder, actually, the miracle, of the Bible is that it presents the exact same God, who does not change, from Genesis to Revelation.

Fifth Oracle: Return to Me, Pay your Tithes (3:7-12)

Verses 8-10, *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!”* But you say, *“How have we robbed You?”* *“In tithes and offerings... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,”* says the LORD of hosts, *“if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”* Concerning the tithes, there were two annual tithes, one for the Levites (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21) and one brought to the temple (first in Shiloh and then in Jerusalem) for an annual feast (Deuteronomy 14:22). Every third year, a tithe was given to the poor in one’s hometown. That may have been an additional third tithe or a replacement for the second tithe every third year.

Since the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 31:11), storehouses were built, either in the courtyard of the temple or outside of it. At any rate, the command was to bring the tithe to the temple. Again, a dispensational reading is demanded by the passage. There is no temple, or storehouse, today, nor are we under a law to tithe. We are commanded to give. Today believers in Christ are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). So the giving should be done to other believers in need (1 John 3:17).

Sixth Oracle: Those who feared the Lord (3:13-18)

Verses 16-17, *Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. “They will be Mine,”* says the LORD of hosts, *“on the day*

that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” Another one of the great 3:16 passages of the Bible is Malachi 3:16, where we learn that in the midst of disregard for the Word of God there were some who feared the Lord, who spoke to one another about the situation, and God wrote a book of remembrance about it. It is a great example of God paying attention to the individuals who fear Him. It is the answer to the question, “What can we do about all the evil around us?” We can object to it and speak about it with others who fear the Lord.

Conclusion: Be Prepared for God’s Coming (4:1-6)

Throughout the prophetic Scripture, there are announcements about a coming cataclysmic event, which is not like any other historical event. It is when the Messiah of God comes to earth. This event is preceded by a tribulation period and followed by a messianic kingdom set up on earth. In the conclusion to his prophecy, Malachi addresses three subjects with this event in mind:

First is the assurance that the Day of the Lord is coming. This is the time where not only are the evildoers destroyed but the righteous are rewarded.

Verses 1-2, “...every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.”

Second, is the command to remember the Law given at Mt. Sinai.

Verse 4, “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.” Notice how the dispensation of the Law was still to be followed in the post-exilic times. It lasted until the death of Christ. **Romans 10:4**, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

An Application is to apply all of Scripture but specifically keep the commandments of God for our church/grace age.

Third, is the revelation that Elijah will return to the earth before the Second Coming.

Verses 5-6, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. Although the Second Coming is a prominent subject for the prophets, this is the only place that mentions a future ministry for Elijah. This may be referring to the messenger of 3:1, but Matthew 11:10 tells us that John the Baptist is the messenger of Malachi 3:1. John himself however, while claiming to prepare the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1) denied that he was Elijah personally. In other words, John was not a reincarnation or resurrection of Elijah (John 1:21-23).

The answer to who John was is best given by the angel to his father Zachariah. John will go forth *in the spirit and power of Elijah* (Luke 1:17). It seems that John somehow shared the prophetic office with Elijah. The question remains, “Should John the Baptist be considered the **fulfillment** of the prophecy about Elijah, or a **type** of Elijah? The second seems preferable because after the revelation of Elijah with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus *answered and said*, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him” (Matthew 17:11-12). This statement speaks of a present and future

ministry for Elijah. It seems to say that John fulfilled part of that ministry, but Elijah himself will come during the Tribulation, before the Second Coming of Christ, possibly one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11.

Verse 6, “*He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*” John the Baptist did not do this. This seems to refer to what Elijah will do before the Second Coming of Christ. We know a believing remnant of all the tribes of Israel will be brought to Jerusalem to reign with the Messiah. This statement seems to say that the ministry of Elijah before the Second Coming will restore the hearts of a chosen element of Jews, whose response to Elijah’s ministry will prevent God from smiting *the land with a curse.*