

MALACHI

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Malachi's name means my messenger or my angel and most of the Church Fathers and early rabbis believe this book to be anonymous. Malachi is later than Haggai and Zechariah as the Temple had been rebuilt. He may have been a contemporary of Nehemiah and his prophecy could be dated not much before 450ABC.

His message is of God's love. The proof of His love was His choice of Jacob in His grace and even if Jacob's descendants were weak, Esau's descendants were much weaker. It seems harsh for God to say Esau have I hated and it must be remembered how Esau was treated. However, Esau became an idolater and fornicator and did not attempt to resolve the problems, or to honour God. The Lord had indignation for the descendants of Esau.

On another issue The love of God made Israel His choice, His firstborn and He expected and deserved the respect and reverence from His people, how could the priests and other Jews doubt the love of God? But they showed Him total disrespect bringing offering that were unworthy of the governor's table and of the Lord. Hence, the Lord's Table was polluted. Animals for the offerings were blind or blemished and the attitude was that anything would do for God. A son honours his father and a servant his master but where is the honour due to God? (verse 6). Does this attitude exist today? I am aware of those who worship God their way and not God's way, and, to put this into common parlance, 'anything will do and we will do it our way.'

Much modern worship is like this.

Even when some people beseeched God to be merciful towards them, the Lord replied that he had no pleasure in them (verses 9 and 10). Insincerity does not fool God.

The fact was that the Jews did not love God. The sacrifices were a drudge and chapter 1 verse 10 states it is far better to have no sacrifices at all. In verse 11, the dispersion of the Jews is highlighted. Some sacrifices were born of deceit and would invoke God's curse (verse 14) and the priests took no remedial action. In chapter 2, the unscrupulous priests are arraigned. Their example was appalling.

God speaks of His covenant with Levi (verse 4ff) which was of peace and fear in the sense of respect. They walked with God in equity but now the priests corrupted the law and caused many both to stumble and to fall because they did not keep the ways of the Lord.

Chapter 2, from verse 10, speaks of that which contradicts God's love in that men were divorcing their wives and marrying heathen women which were expressions of apostasy as shown in the life of Solomon. In addition, these badly treated women would not easily find another husband, and by now, monogamy was ideal. The Lord dislikes a husband putting away his wife. We read that the descendants of Jacob have been treacherous against everyone even his own brother. Often they feigned repentance (2. 13) but God is not fooled. The people wearied the Lord with their words. It is repentance and restoration that is needed.

Chapter three speaks of the Lord sending a messenger before Himself who is clearly John the Baptist who will prepare the way of the Lord. Who shall be able to stand before Him? He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers soap. He will judge sorcerers, adulterers, false accusers and those who oppress and cause distress to widows and orphans and those who disregard others. Verse 6 is important. The Lord does not change and there will be forgiveness available for the repentant people of Jacob's line as in former times.

In verse 7, the Lord pleads with His people to return to Him and He will return unto them and their sins and treachery will be forgiven. Many people dwell on the severity of God but forget His mercy and eagerness to forgive. The Jews had withheld their tithes, robbed God in tithes and offerings and that is why they had become a curse but the end result is that God wants his people to prosper and all the nations to know that God is blessing them. The people had used strong words against the Lord and said that it was vain to serve God and they called the proud happy people. A book was written about those who did respect the Lord, or a record of them was made. The Lord says that in a day to come when the Lord will make up His jewels, these named true believers who respected the Lord will be spared. There follows a note of caution that we must discern between the righteous and the wicked, those who serve the Lord and those that do not.

Sadly, there are those who claim to belong to the Lord but are promoting themselves. The epistle of James reminds us that God resists the proud.

Chapter four speaks of the earth burning as an oven but this is a reference to the fire of judgment not a conflagration. The proud and the wicked will be severely punished because of their sins. But to those who fear the Lord, that is to say respect and honour Him, there will be healing from the Righteous One and these godly people will prosper and trample down the proud and wicked. There is always a call to repentance.

Elijah in the Old Testament was known both as the reformer and restorer and the one who prepared the way for the future. He is therefore likened to John the Baptist who was also to prepare the way but, as with Elijah, would the people receive and accept him? Elijah was forced into the wilderness by Ahab's evil wife Jezebel who was full of hatred. Eventually, John was hated after time in the wilderness. But this second Elijah would appear and the Lord Jesus said of him that no greater man was ever born.

There are lessons to be learned. We are to love the Lord and not doubt His love for us. We are to bring Him our best and not bring anything less. We are to worship Him as He instructs and our worship is not to follow any worldly methods. How we express ourselves, or want to express ourselves, is not the regulation for worship. Worship is worthship and what we bring to the Lord must be spiritual and not of this world. We are not to be proud and promote ourselves or others. There are Divine promises and blessings to those who are true to the Lord and this is why we follow Him as closely as we can. If he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all. What of our religious leaders of our day? Do priests and vicars faithfully preach the Gospel and put the Lord first?

The other great lesson is that Malachi is a book about morality. Is this preached in our churches or secular world, where, in the UK, only 2% go to church? Standards continue to drop.

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