

# Malachi

Malachi was the last of the writing prophets of the Old Testament. Hundreds of years later, when Jesus was an infant, we have note of the father of John the baptizer prophesying (Luke 1:67ff), and a man named Simeon who received divine messages (Luke 2:25ff) and a woman named Anna who was a prophetess (Luke 2:36). And then of course John the baptizer was also a prophet of God as the end of the Old Covenant drew near (Matthew 11:7-9). There were some prophets among the people in those 400+ years of Biblical “silence,” but whatever prophets there were in the days from Malachi to Jesus, they were not led by the Spirit of God to add to the sacred text, as the whole cosmos awaited the coming of the Son of Man.

Malachi prophesied in the same time frame as Ezra and Nehemiah’s work in behalf of Jerusalem and the temple. Some of his themes echo problems those leaders had to confront, including issues of the holiness of God, the provision of proper sacrifices and regular tithes, marriage to non-Jewish women, particularly on the part of the priests, and trusting God enough to follow his commandments so that he would bless them.

The name Malachi in 1:1 means “my messenger” which is a descriptive term also found in 3:1.

Several of Malachi’s themes are highlighted by a question-answer style using irony and satire. God makes a statement, Israel questions the statement, and God replies to the objection.

God’s choice of Israel is highlighted in the first several verses, by comparing the plight of rejected Esau. 1:6 takes up the theme of unacceptable offerings, depicted God as Father and LORD and King. The irony in v10, fake worship is worse than no worship at all, typifies the book.

God’s promises stand, despite the cheating hearts of the people. His future greatness among the nations through the Christ is stated in 1:11 and 1:14b.

The priests are raked over the coals in 2:1-9, failing to uphold the divine covenant stated in Numbers 25:12-13, when Phinehas was zealous for God and for the atonement of the people. Notice the core responsibility of the priests in 2:6-7, which is still a responsibility of the New Covenant kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9), priests are to be instructors, proclaiming the excellencies of God, without partiality (James 2:1ff).

Malachi 2:10 takes up the theme of mis-marriage also addressed in Ezra and Nehemiah, but with the added irony that Jewish men were leaving God’s household by profaning their own families, leaving their Jewish wives to marry women who were not followers of God. The sanctity of the marriage covenant is stressed in 2:14-16, and willful divorce is a treacherous act of violence, harming the very children given as a blessing of God.

Be wary of the words/attitudes of 2:17, echoed by Paul in Romans 1:32.

Malachi 3 foretells the coming of the Lord to his temple, with John the Baptizer preparing the way (Mark 1:2). While the Lord called John “my messenger” he calls himself “the messenger of

the covenant” in 3:1. Jesus the redeemer is also Jesus the refiner and judge (Luke 12:49, for example).

Note the list of condemning sins in 3:5 includes some of the 10 commandments, but also oppression of the poor and injustice for the weak and powerless, including orphans, widows, and foreigners.

God’s unchanging nature (3:6) is the reason descendants of Israel still existed, despite frequent and egregious unfaithfulness. God had purposes and promises that he would and did see through.

Malachi 3:8 is perhaps the best known of the messenger’s rhetorical questions.

The blessings for obedience in 3:10-12 were only intermittently realized, never permanently for Israel in the flesh, because the obedience was never persistent.

Malachi 3:16 notes the remnant, those who feared the LORD and were in communion with one another. The faithful remnant have a permanent place among God’s people, and the book of remembrance no doubt is one of those opened at judgement in Revelation 20:12.

The “treasured possession” (3:17) had been mentioned as a covenant blessing at Sinai (Exodus 19:5) but waited for the New Covenant of Jesus to be realized (1 Peter 2:9).

Malachi 4 anticipates the consummation of the kingdom of Christ, begun with his life, death, resurrection, and ascent into glory, and fulfilled in his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. John proclaimed that it was in the works (Matthew 3:10-12), and Peter affirmed that it is in process (2 Peter 1:19). The Sun of Righteousness has appeared in the person of Jesus, and will be seen in his full glory with “healing in its wings.” Considering that “wings” is a term also used for the “corners of your garments” (Numbers 15:38, Ruth 2:12/3:9). Jesus brought this prophecy to mind in Matthew 9:20 when the woman touched the fringe of his garment (as referenced in Numbers 15:38) and she was healed. Malachi 4:3 is probably one of the passages Paul had in mind when he wrote Romans 16:20.

Elijah in 4:5 was, according to Jesus and the apostles, John the baptizer. Not in the sense of reincarnation or anything like that, but in terms of the task Elijah had in the regime of Ahab and Jezebel, and that he left his ministry to another.