

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets

Studies in the Minor Prophets

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

Jersey Shore Baptist Church

Pastor Phil Erickson

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Malachi

Introduction (1:1)

Malachi is the last voice of the Old Testament, and the last prophet before John the Baptist (whom he foretold of in 3:1) to declare the coming Messiah. The name Malachi means “my messenger”, and comes from the same word translated messenger in Malachi 2:7, and 3:1, which is also the same word for angel throughout the Old Testament. The Book of Malachi was written around 430 BC, after the time of Haggai and Zechariah; and, near the time of Nehemiah (or slightly after). Haggai wrote before the temple was completed, Zechariah wrote during the completion of the temple, and Malachi writes about a completed temple. (See 1:10, 3:1, 3:10) Not much is known about this messenger of God, but his message is remarkable.

Malachi writes during the time of restoration, and though he reminds the people of God of God’s love for them, he also rebukes them for the many abuses that have crept back into their nation, including:

- 1 the priests had become lax and degenerate
- 2 they were offering defective sacrifices on the altar
- 3 divorce was becoming more common
- 4 people were neglecting tithes and offerings

The Book opens with a declaration of God’s love for Israel, and closes with a reminder to remember the Law of Moses. The Book divides into seven main sections.

Malachi writes with an interesting style. He introduces each section of the Book with a declaration that is followed by a question by the people, which demonstrates their lack of understanding and disagreement of God’s declaration. Basically, the format is this: “ God says, ..., but you say,”

I A Declaration of God’s Love for Israel (1:2 – 5)

God loved them but they doubted God’s love, and because they doubted God’s love, they didn’t love Him back.

The main truth of this section is not God’s hatred of Esau, but God’s love for Jacob. Some folks have a problem with the fact that God hated Esau, but I have a hard time understanding why God loved Jacob (or anybody else for that matter, including me). It actually took God quite a while before He actually declared His love for anybody (Deuteronomy 7:6 – 11).

"Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." (Deuteronomy 10:15)

It also took God a long time to say that He hated Edom (or Esau). It wasn't until long after the life of Esau (the person) was ended, and also long after the history of the Edomites (the descendants of Esau) had been established. Esau had lived a life that indicated that he was not a man of faith; and the Edomites were cruel enemies of the Israelites for much of their existence. (See Numbers 20:14 – 21) God is specifically speaking here of the Nation of Edom. The word "hated" in v. 3 has the idea of rejection. McGee said this about God rejecting Edom: "This reveals, therefore, that God's choice is neither capricious nor is it an arbitrary choice. God does not make choices like that. There has to be something to back it up."¹

The Bible has often conveyed the idea that when we choose someone over somebody else, we are rejecting them and in a sense it is hatred:

"And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren." (Genesis 29:30-31)

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

Some try to use this passage, along with Romans 9:13 where this passage is quoted, to prove that God chooses (predestines, elects) some to Hell. While I do not understand the sovereignty of God completely, I do know that God is **not willing** that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9); and that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord (in faith with a repentant heart) shall be saved. (Romans 10:13) Because of God's foreknowledge He knows who the "whosoever wills" are.

The point of this section of Malachi is that God demonstrated His love for Israel in that He has preserved Israel as a nation. God made a covenant with Israel, not Esau. The covenant began with Abraham (Genesis 12:1 – 3; 17:1 – 8; 18:17 – 19; 22:15 – 18), continued through Isaac (Genesis 21:12), and then Jacob (Genesis 35: 10 – 12). God is telling Israel that He has demonstrated His love for them. He demonstrated His love for us as well:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The Edomites were eventually destroyed as a nation. (See the notes from Obadiah for more information on the nation of Edom.)

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible Commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 993). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

II A Denunciation of the Priests (1:6 – 2:9)

God rebukes the priests for their lackadaisical attitude toward their service in the temple. They offered polluted bread, and kept the best sacrifices for themselves while giving God the deformed animals. We are supposed to offer God our best, not our junk. God also reminds them that they are His messengers, but they have departed from His law and had been partial in their dealings with it.

God rebuked the priests because of their:

A Defective Sacrifices (Malachi 1:6 – 14)

See Leviticus 22:20 – 25

"And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God." (Deuteronomy 15:21)

God wants our best, and God wants to be first:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

V. 8 – “the table” was a reference to the brazen altar, not the table of shewbread. The brazen altar was where the sacrifices were offered.

“the governor” – the priests were offering to God what the government would not accept by way of taxation.

V. 9 – an invitation to repent.

V. 10 – God was basically saying that they were better off shutting the doors, because their insincere and insufficient sacrifices were displeasing him anyway. (See Isaiah 1:11 – 15)

Vs. 11 and 14 – God wants us (His people) to glorify Him in front of the lost world out there, and we are cutting corners in our worship, it doesn't make God look good.

Notice v. 13: “what a weariness is it!”, and “ye have snuffed at it” – The priests were tired of serving God.

I think this is our problem at times. When we first get saved, we love everything about God and His Church, but after we have been saved for a little while, it all gets old. And, we begin to let a lot of other stuff get in between us and the Lord.

B Deferential Submission (Malachi 2:1 – 9)

Malachi 2:4 – 5; 8 – God's covenant with Levi was that they would be the tribe that ministered in the Temple:

"Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the

vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle.

And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." (Numbers 1:49-51)

One of their duties was to teach the people:

"They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar." (Deuteronomy 33:10)

Apparently, the Levites in Malachi's day would be partial in their application of the Law.

See James 2:1 – 9

Perhaps, they were only teaching the parts they liked. Or, maybe they were letting some of the rich members of the congregation to get away with things.

Practical Thoughts

We are all priests.

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)

We all have a great high priest, Jesus Christ who says that we have access to the throne of grace.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

All saved people are in a sense commanded to study and teach the Bible.

So, these admonitions from Malachi to these Levites, apply to us as well.

We need to give God our best, and we need to put God first.

He deserves better than our spare change or our leftover time.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

Putting God first does not mean that we necessarily give a lot. The widow only gave two mites, but the Bible says she gave her all. (See Matthew 12:41 – 44)

We also need to teach the whole counsel of God.

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:26-27)

We cannot pick and choose the parts we obey, or the parts we teach.

All of these practical thoughts are especially true for those called to be spiritual leaders.

"But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:48)

III A Denunciation of Idolatry and Divorce (2:10 – 16)

In this section, God also denounces spiritually mixed marriages. The Israelites were commanded to marry only within the household of faith. In Exodus 34:14 – 16, God gave His commandments regarding intermarriage and made a clear connection between idolatry and intermarriage with non-Israelites (unsaved people). In Nehemiah 13:23 – 31, we see the problem viewed in its historical context. Remember, Malachi was writing at approximately the same time as Nehemiah.

A key phrase in this section is “deal treacherously” (vs. 10, 11, 14, 15, 16) God states five times that these men who were divorcing their wives so that they could intermarry with these pagan women, were “dealing treacherously.”

V. 10 – Malachi introduces the subject by stating that the Israelites were violating the covenant of their Father. The context will reveal that it was through intermarriage with these pagan women, after divorcing the wives of their youth. The intermarrying led to idolatry, and it had an adverse effect on the entire nation. The marriage covenant was a type of God’s covenant, just as the New Testament marriage is a picture of Christ and His Bride, the Church. (See Ephesians 5:22 – 33)

V. 11 – deals with the deeper problem of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, but He will specify in the verses that follow how individual Israelites were violating their marriage covenants in the same way.

"Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD." (Jeremiah 3:20)

"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2)

V. 12 – Here the prophecy is specifically against the individuals that were guilty of this; whether they were “masters” or “scholars,” or even “priests.” This had been a problem for Israel throughout their history. (Judges 3:5 – 7; Ezra 9)

V. 13 is a curious verse. God’s altar was covered with tears. This could be the tears of the wives that had been forsaken. Because the people, and even some priests were guilty of doing this, God would not receive their offerings “with good will” anymore. In other words, He would not be pleased with their gifts or their sacrifices if they were dealing treacherously with their wives.

V. 14 - Along with divorce and intermarriage with the unsaved, these verses could also be used to denounce polygamy, because by marrying a second wife, they were dealing treacherously against “the wife (singular) of thy youth,” and “the wife of thy covenant:”

"And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matthew 19:4-6)

V. 15 – The idea of this verse is that by intermarrying with these heathen women, the Israelites were polluting the godly seed. They were diluting the faith. This has nothing to do with race, but has everything to do with religion, or rather relationship.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

When you marry outside of the household of faith, you have a far greater chance that your children will not become saved.

When you break the covenant with the wife (or husband) of your youth, by divorcing and re-marrying, you are bringing into that covenant fourth party:

"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

V. 16 is the bottom line – God hates divorce (“putting away”)

Notice the statement – “covereth violence with a garment.” This probably has to do with the Jewish tradition of covering a wife with the outer garment as a pledge of protection. (See Ruth 3:6 – 9) God is saying that by divorcing their wives they were not covering their wives with protection, but with violence.

Practical Truths:

- 1 Be careful who you marry – make sure they are God’s will for you.
- 2 Be faithful to who you marry.

"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (Hebrews 13:4)

- 3 Don’t divorce.
- 4 If your spouse divorces you, do everything that you can do to fix it, until they re-marry.
- 5 The only Biblical grounds for the dissolving of the marriage covenant are: death (Romans 7:1 – 3); desecration of the marriage bed (Matthew 19:9); and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:12 – 16)

IV A Declaration of Coming Judgment and a Call to Repentance (2:17 – 3:7)

The people said that God didn't care about evil, that He was somehow OK with evil, but they were mistaken. God hates evil and evil will eventually be judged.

See Psalm 73:1 - 20

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20)

The fact is that God is very angry with the wicked, and cares greatly for the righteous.

"God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day." (Psalm 7:11)

God will deal with evil in His time. Ultimately, all evil will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11 – 15)

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

In Malachi Three there is a reference to two messengers: one of which is John the Baptist who was the forerunner to the second one, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matthew 11:7 – 15; Mark 1:2)

Wiersbe says, "While Malachi was the last of the writing prophets, John the Baptist was the last and the greatest of the Old Covenant prophets."²

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Matthew 3:1-3)

The reference in Malachi speaks of the one coming to judge, yet both the messengers appear at Christ's first coming, when He came not to judge, but to save. God is giving the wicked an opportunity to repent and turn to Him, before He judges them.

God is not only just, but He is also the justifier. He satisfied God's judgement for all men:

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26)

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Amazed* (p. 153). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

McGee states:

Therefore, this is God's answer to the people of Israel: God will send Him first as a Savior because He is gracious and He wants to save. But that doesn't end it all: He is coming again as the messenger of the covenant, that is, to execute justice and judgment on this earth.³

The covenant spoken of here is God's covenant with Israel, not the new covenant.

Vs. 2 - 3 – "refiner's fire" and "fuller's soap" – Fire purges and soap cleanses. This is a reference to the purifying power of the Lord Jesus to cleanse Israel.

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you." (Ezekiel 22:17-22)

V. 4 – Israel's offerings at Zerubbabel's Temple were not accepted because Israel was not doing right. They were hypocritically serving the Lord while they were divorcing their wives, marrying unsaved women, offering inferior sacrifices, and not giving God His tithes and offerings. God said they needed to be cleansed and purged before their offerings could be pleasant to Him, and that will not happen until He comes again.

Cleansing is salvation, while purging is sanctification. God saves us, but then He removes the impurities from our lives.

V. 5 – 6 – God doesn't change, but the people thought that He did:

"When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:18-23)

V. 7 – God is telling these post-exile Israelites to stop worrying about the judgment of the wicked, and be more concerned about God's purging of their own sin. The fact is they needed to return to the Lord, just as much as the heathen did.

³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 1016). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

V A Denunciation of Their Giving Practice (3:8 – 12)

We transition into this section on tithing from vs. 6 – 7 from the previous section where God admonishes the people of Israel to return unto Him. You will notice that God states that He will return to them if they return to Him. This is similar to what James said:

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." (James 4:8)

Malachi now rebukes the people for “robbing God” by withholding their tithes and offerings.

Israel actually gave more than just a tithe:

The offerings in Israel were the firstfruits, not less than one-sixtieth of the corn, wine, and oil. (Deuteronomy 18:4). There were several kinds of tithes: (1) the tenth of the remainder after the firstfruits were taken, this amount going to Levites for their livelihood (Leviticus 27:30–33); (2) the tenth paid by Levites to the priests (Numbers 18:26–28); (3) the second tenth paid by the congregation for the needs of the Levites and their own families at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:18); and (4) another tithe every third year for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28–29).⁴

The tithe predates the Law. (Genesis 14:18 – 20; Genesis 22:11 – 22)

The Law commanded the tithe. (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:22 – 28)

The Lord Jesus recognized the tithe as right. (Matthew 23:23)

The tithe was to be given to the storehouse (the temple). Today, God’s storehouse is the New Testament church. A tithe is a good place to start for the New Testament Christian.

Offerings were voluntary contributions over and above the tithe. Someone has said that you really do not start giving until you are giving offerings. Offerings prove the “sincerity of our love”. (2 Corinthians 8:8)

God said that if the people would put him first (Matthew 6:33; Luke 6:38) then He would not only open the windows of provision, but He would also protect what was already provided from the devourer. The result of this will be that other nations would see that God’s hand was upon them.

Note – this is the only time that God asks us to “prove” Him, or put Him to the test.

Give Cheerfully

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Give Copiously (Generously)

Give Consistently

⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible Commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 1021). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

Give Confidently

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:38)

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

VI A Differentiation between the Righteous and the Wicked (3:13 – 4:3)

Notice here that God says there are many who will reject the Lord, but there are also many who will receive the righteousness of the Lord through faith in His "Sun of Righteousness".

VII A Direction to Obey the Law of Moses (4:4 – 4:6)

It seems so simple, but here in this concluding section, Malachi reminds the people to remember the Word of God. (Deuteronomy 6:6 – 9; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1)

Note – I believe that verse 5 and 6 refer to one of the two witnesses that will be on the scene during the Great Tribulation Period. (Revelation 11:3 – 12) They are the forerunners of Christ's second coming. Others believe that this is another reference to John the Baptist.