

MALACHI

Intro: We have come to the last book of the OT. It has been a taxing task to learn to do an overview of a whole book and reduce it to one or two messages. But this morning we will conclude 19 messages in the minor prophets of the OT. J. Vernon McGee says Malachi brings down the curtain on the OT. The inspired books of the first covenant are finished with this book. The name Malachi means 'My Messenger'. He was Jehovah's last messenger of the OT. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, says in verse 1 that this book is written by the Lord's *angellos*, or angel (read). The Greek word for angel means a messenger.

This book is written somewhere around 400 BC and it is the last inspired book of the OT. Go for a moment to the last two verses in this book (read). Here is a prophecy that at least in part was filled by John the Baptist. Between Malachi and John the Baptist, no more divinely inspired prophets were born. So we know these as the 400 silent years. God was not silent during those years, but as far as giving inspired writings, He had fallen silent.

If you were to read the books we know as the Apocrypha, they occur during those 400 silent years but those books are not inspired by God. When we call a book inspired we mean that the original autograph was without error. And so, though these books are not inspired, there is quite a lot of accurate history in them.

In the writings of the minor prophets we saw God's warnings to the northern and southern kingdoms. Then in 722 BC, the northern kingdom went into captivity. In 586 BC, the southern kingdom went into captivity. This captivity was to last 70 years according to the prophet Jeremiah, and it did. But during those 70 years the Medes and Persians defeated Babylon and allowed Jews to return to Israel. They did return and they began to rebuild the temple but after much opposition, the building on the temple ceased. Then God sent Haggai and Zechariah to prod the people and encourage them to complete the building of the temple and they obeyed and completed it.

By the time Malachi writes about 100 years have passed since the Jews returned to Israel after the captivity and their spiritual lives once more have suffered. And though their spiritual lives have sunk low, they cannot understand why the blessing of the Lord is not there. Then God sent Malachi to rebuke them and call them to repentance.

Verse one is an introduction and gives us the subject of the book. It says, "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." When I used to read such statements they did not really sink in. Now when I read that the burden of the word of the Lord has come to someone I know they are going to experience much difficulty. We have had Warren Smith here recently. I see him as a man to whom the Lord has given a burden, and it is a thing that in the OT at least, could have cost him his life.

This burden that Malachi has is given to us in seven segments I will call sessions. Each sessions begins with a statement by the Lord which is followed by a question from the people and then the answer is given. Then come the results of Malachi's message and the conclusion to it. So we begin with session one.

I. THE CONTENTS OF MALACHI'S MESSAGE (1:2-3:15)

A. Session One (2-5)

Session 1 is found in 1:2-5. We find the statement in 2a (read). The Lord says, "I have loved you." And Israel, in their backslidden state asks this question in 2b: "In what way have You loved us?" And then God gives the answer in 2c-5 (read).

Israel had been disobedient to God. God had allowed the Babylonians to come and destroy their beloved city and the temple. Then under the Medes and Persians He had allowed them to return and rebuild and now they were in their land and in their city. They should have worshipped and praised God and grown in grace, but they were once more backslidden.

And God says, "Look at Esau." This is a reference to the Edomites. The Edomites came from Esau, Jacob's older twin brother. They were perpetual enemies to Israel. And God had laid waste. But Israel, because of her backslidden state, failed to see her blessings. J. Vernon McGee tells this little story. A student came to Dr. Griffith Thomas and said, "I have a problem. Why does God say He hated Esau?" And Dr. Griffith Thomas said, "I have a problem with that verse too. But my problem is, why did God say He loved Jacob?"

Well, though that may present somewhat of a problem, we have an answer to both those problems. Do you know why God hated Esau? Because when he had all the privileges of the firstborn, he despised his birthright. Esau, with all his privileges became an outright unbeliever! He

failed to believe. But Jacob, with all the problems he had, in the end always came back to trust God. And Israel, with all her blessings at this very point should have been prospering in the faith; but she was backsliding.

Maybe there is someone here this morning in that very same predicament. The call of God is to repent!

B. Session Two (1:6-2:13)

In the next two sessions between God and Israel God calls the priests to task. In 1:6 - 2:13 we have session 2 and the first address is to the priests. We begin with the statement in 6a (read). God says to the priests, "You ought to honor Me but you despise my name." He could say that today to many seeker friendly and emergent church leaders. And those church leaders would answer just like these Jewish leaders did at the end of verse 6. They responded like this, "In what way have we despised Your name?"

Well God said, "I'm glad you asked." So He answers in 1:7-2:13. Look at what God says in verses 7-8 (read). Their sacrifices were to be without blemish but they were offering to God the blind and the lame and the sick! In verse 9, God calls them to repentance (read).

Verse 10 then indicates that God would sooner have no worship than this false worship (read). There are many churches who do God a disfavor by having church. The people go to church and feel better for having gone, but they have not changed at all. Some commentaries say that verse 10 would better read, "Oh that there were someone among you to close the doors." So if Israel does not repent, she should close the doors of the temple because God has no pleasure in their worship. May I ask you, does God have any pleasure in your attending church? Do you let Him speak to you? Do you change when you hear His word?

I see in verse 11 a prophecy, and though it is not apparent at this time, no doubt we are included in this verse (read). The name of the Lord is to be great. But according to verse 12, the priests profane it. Look at verses 12-14 (read).

So God instructs the priest in 2:1-2 (read). Now look at how God concludes with these priests in 2:3-9 (read).

C. Session Three (2:10-16)

The third session, found in 2:10-16, is about Judah's unfaithfulness to God's institution of marriage. In verses 10-12 they transgressed God's holy commandment by marrying women who worshipped other gods (read). This is the unequal yoke God abhors. The institution of marriage and God's laws regarding this institution are tremendously important and Israel was violating them. Our passage says God loves His institution of marriage. Verse 12 is very strong. Here is a man who has married a woman who worships another god, and then He comes to the temple that has been rebuilt to bring an offering to God. How horrendous! And Malachi says, "May the Lord cut off from Israel people who live like this."

The Jews were guilty of two great evils here. First, they married wives who worshipped foreign gods. We find the second thing in verse 13 (read). God says to these priests, "This is the second thing you do." The first thing they did was to offer sacrifices to God when they had married wives who worshipped false gods. The second thing they did was cover the altar with tears, with weeping and crying. Well, that sounds good. But God does not regard all their tears and sacrifices and here comes the question in 14a: Why does God not hear us when we cry with tears?

The answer comes in 14b-16 (read). Before I comment, let me say that the translation of these two verses is very difficult. I am simply staying with the translation of the KJV or the NKJV which seem to me to give the best renderings here. So, the second reason God would not listen when they wept and cried on the altar was that they were divorcing their wives. They were divorcing their proper wives and then marrying wives who worshipped false gods and then brought sacrifices to God and covered the altar with tears. What horrendous sacrilege.

It is an interesting thing to me that when divorce is allowed in the church, some of the most willing workers are divorced people. Why would that be? As I have pondered that, it seems to me that it is a means of finding acceptance with people and with God while living in something their conscience troubles them with. These priests were very pious in the temple but very corrupt at home. And in verse 14 God calls this dealing 'treacherously' with their wives. You see, they have divorced their God given wife and married a woman who worships false gods. This is treachery.

And though they have divorced their first wife God says this, "She is still your companion; she is still your wife by covenant." Now there is treachery. They had married a woman, the first one, and she was their God given companion and they were tied to her by covenant, but they have divorced her and married a woman who worships other gods! How horrendous. And then they were crying out to God and saying we have sacrificed all the right things and You do not hear us! But small wonder. They needed to repent, not sacrifice!

Then look at verse 15 (read). When they originally married, did God not make them one? Now I have mentioned earlier that the translation here is difficult. But I leave it as that God made each of these couples one when they were married. And then comes this very interesting question: Why does God make two people one when they get married? Why? Why should man not live like many of the animals do? And the text gives the answer. Because He seeks godly offspring.

So, our passage goes on, "Therefore take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth." Why should they stay with their first wife? Because God seeks godly offspring. So verse 16 says that God hates divorce. It amazes me that Bible teachers teach that in some cases divorce is permitted. How can it be permitted if God hates it? What else does God hate but it is permissible?

D. Session Four (2:17)

In 2:17 we have a fourth indictment (read 17a). Israel had wearied God with their words. But they said, "In what way have we wearied the Lord?" Here is how. They said, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and He delights in them." Or they say, "Where is the God of justice?"

When the Bible says of some people like in this passage, "You say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord", I don't think it means they say this in words. In words they present themselves as godly and spiritual, but they say it in action. Revelation 3:17 says, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' —and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—." I do not think these people said that but they lived like that. They were saying it by their life-style.

E. Session Five (3:1-7)

Chapter 3:1-6 is a difficult section. These indictments usually begin with a statement by the Lord, followed by a question and then the answer. It may be that here we have the answer to the question given before the question. Some view 3:1-6 as a parenthesis, that is, that it is unrelated to the rest here. But it may be that it is the answer to their question in verse 7.

The way I see it, instead of the indictment being given at the beginning, it is given at the end. So this section could be read with verse 7b given first and then verses 1-7a following. So, it would begin like this from 7b, "'Return to Me and I will return to you', says the Lord of Hosts." But they said, "In what way shall we return?" The answer then is given in 3:1-7a.

In 3:1-7, we have a prophecy of the coming of Christ, with John the Baptist as the forerunner. Let us look at verse 1 (read). When it says, "Behold, I send My messenger..." that is a reference to John the Baptist. And when it says, "...he will prepare the way before Me..." the pronoun 'Me' refers to Jesus Christ. The rest is a description then of what will happen. So let us read 3:1-7a (read).

F. Session Six (3:8-12)

Our next indictment comes in verse 8 (read). The indictment is this. God says, "You are robbing Me!" Can you imagine something worse than robbing God? But these Jews were robbing God. And how were they doing that? By withholding their tithes. Tithing is giving 10% of one's income to God. You say, "Do you mean I should give a tenth of my money to God?" No, of all that He gives to us, we get to keep 90%. As I grew up, I did learn to give anything to the Lord. I grew up in a congregation that gave very little to the church and what was given was given to pay the taxes on the church property, and even this the congregation had to be reminded to do. I had a very difficult time when I first heard of tithing after I became a Christian. But our passage speaks not only tithes, but of offerings as well. You see, offerings are over and above tithes. Special needs of various kinds might arise and one might offer to give to such a need.

Now look at verse 9 (read). Verse 10 then challenges these stingy Jews to try God out (Ill. of Gus here?). Then in verses 11-12 God says He will remove the curse of verse 9 if they will give to Him (read). Now I would like to add here that truly, God does not request a tithe for His sake. He does it for our sake. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but we need to learn to give to Him. Do you know how much money you save by being a Christian? Do you know how expensive cigarettes and alcohol and many other vices are?

G. Session Seven (3:13-15)

We come now to the seventh and last indictment. Let us read verses 13-15 (read). The indictment is, "Your words have been harsh against Me." And of course they said, "What have we spoken against You?"

If Malachi wrote around 400 years before Christ, the prophets had then been silent for over 100 years. Israel was in the doldrums. Nothing seemed to be happening. It seemed to them as though God did not care and it seemed as though it made no difference if they served God or if they did not. Every once in a while, it seems God comes down and speaks to man and then there is a time when He may seem withdrawn. Someone has called this living between the steps. And Israel was failing miserably between the steps. We are in a day like that. As a matter of fact, it seems as if those who disobey God, like the emergent church etc... are being blessed with growth. But just because God does not do some great thing against evil doers is no reason to forsake God. The time will come when He takes another step, and the next step may be the rapture. The Pharisees and Sadducees came into existence during these next 400 silent years and they had forsaken God almost entirely though they put on a great religious show. We learn this from Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

II. THE RESULTS OF MALACHI'S MESSAGE (3:16-4:3)

As I outline the book, in 3:16-4:3, we have the results of Malachi's message. So look at 3:16 (read). There were those, even in that day, that feared the Lord. God has always had a remnant. There have always been at least some. And those that feared the Lord did an important thing. They spoke one to another. It is amazing the strength that comes from conversing with those who are of like mind. And God was pleased to see this. This tells us that when those who fear the Lord converse one

with another, God takes notice. But notice that they did not only fear the Lord, they thought on God's name. When Erik Hovund was here he quoted A.W. Tozer who said, "What first comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." When we do not think on God's name, or on who God is, and what His attributes are, when we think about Him, not much comes to mind. And what we think about God determines how we live our lives. And God was so pleased that in this time when only a few remained that truly feared Him and thought on His name that they conversed one with another that a book of remembrance was written before Him about this.

Now look at verses 17-18 (read). Here is how God treasures those who fear Him and think on His name! Then look at 4:1-3 (read).

III. THE CONCLUSION OF MALACHI'S MESSAGE (4:4-6)

A. Looking back (4:4)

I view verses 4-6 as Malachi's the final conclusion. In verse 4, we have this conclusion looking back to Moses' commands (read). It is something like Solomon's conclusion to the book of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, he said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."

B. Looking ahead (4:5-7)

In verses 5-7, Malachi closes by looking ahead (read). In my understanding of this passage, there was a far and near fulfillment of this prophecy. The near fulfillment took place when John the Baptist came (see Matt. 11:11-14). Well, the prophets fell silent after Malachi, and for 400 years they were silent until John the Baptist came. He was the very next prophet after Malachi. And he prepared the way for the Lord. And when his task was done, he died a martyr's death. The last prophet in the OT died for his ministry, and so did the first and second prophets of the NT; John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

But this prophecy will have yet have its complete fulfillment in the tribulation. I believe one of the two witnesses that comes at the beginning of the tribulation

and that causes many people to be saved will be Elijah. Over the centuries when the Jews commemorate the Passover they set an extra chair at the table for Elijah, in case he might appear at this Passover. They expect him to come some day and each Passover they expect him. During the Seder, at a certain point, one of the children is told to go check and see if Elijah is coming. And each year he comes back inside to sadly report that once more, this year, Elijah is not coming. But one day he will come, as is promised here.

It is amazing that the final word of the OT should be the word 'curse'. Elijah was to come and turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. J.R. Church says, "When John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, his ministry was cut short. He was not allowed to turn the 'heart of the children to the fathers.' Therefore, the Lord followed through with His threat and smote the earth with a curse. He drove the Jewish people from their land to the slave markets of the world where they have suffered over these past 2,000 years. But when Elijah appears the next time, he will succeed in bringing revival to the nation Israel. And Jesus will not curse the earth, He will establish a glorious kingdom and rule for one thousand years" (212).

CONCL: So, we bring to a close these studies of the minor prophets in the OT. In Malachi we looked first at the seven sessions of God with Israel. 1 God said, "I have loved you." And they said, "In what way have You loved us?" And God answers them that he did this by loving Jacob but hating Esau. Then the Lord said, "You have despised My name." And they said, "How have we done that?" And God answers that they have defiled His altar by sacrificing blemished animals. Third, they were unfaithful to their wives and then they cried to God and asked why He would not regard their offerings. And God said it was because they were untrue to the institution of marriage. Then God said they had wearied Him. And they asked why He would say that? And he said because you call that which is evil good. This past week I heard Rob Bell, whom someone has called, 'No hell Bell.' He does not believe there is a literal hell. But I heard this minister talk about what fine Christians many homosexuals were. By saying that, he called evil good!

Then God said, "Return to Me and I will return to you." And they said, "How shall we return?" God Almighty called them to return and they had no idea they had even been away! There seemed to be no conviction in their own lives. Their sins had to be patiently pointed out to them one by one, and yet they were in rebellion.

Then God said He would send His messenger, referring to John the Baptist. And there were no more prophets for Israel until John, which was some 400 years later.

Then God said, "You have been robbing Me!" And they said, "In what way have we robbed You?" And God had to point out to them that they had failed in tithes and offerings, and in this way they had robbed Him. And last, God said, "Your words have been harsh against Me." And again they said, "What have we spoken against You?" Well, they had said it is vain to serve God. Now I suspect they did not say these words with their lips, they said them with their life. May I ask this morning, by your life, might it be said of you, "He or she says it is vain to serve God." You see, when we do not serve Him, we are saying it is vain. But maybe you say, "Well, I am in church." Did you serve Him in church in some way this morning? Or did you just come. Going to church is not serving God. It is for your own benefit.

Well, we completed Malachi by looking at the results of his message. Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and God wrote a book of remembrance about that. He was pleased that at least a remnant was faithful to Him. And last, we looked at the conclusion as found in 4:4-6. Malachi called them to remember the law of Moses, and then he prophesied that God would send Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord. In part, that was fulfilled in John the Baptist. It will be completely fulfilled when the two prophets come and witness in Jerusalem for three and one half years.