

MINOR PROPHET: MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of Malachi demonstrates God's love for the Israelites despite their failures. God reminds the Israelites that he chose them as his covenant people. Israel doubts God's love and faithfulness. God also accuses the people of defiling the temple by bringing sick, blemished animals as sacrifices for the people's sins. God calls them out for not valuing or honoring him. God also speaks to the Israelite men who have not been loyal to their wives or to him as their God. The Israelite people seem okay with their problems, but Malachi says they are betraying their covenant with God.

In the next section of Malachi, God confronts Israel's rebellion. The Israelites accuse God of sitting idly by as injustices and corruption take place. God reminds his people that he's sending a messenger to purify his people. God asks the Israelites to come back to him and remain faithful to him. The Israelites say it is pointless to serve him because wicked people seem to succeed in life and God does nothing about it. The response is a story about the faithful remnant of Israel who still fear God and honor and serve them. God orders a "scroll of remembrance" to be written so that the Israelite people remember God's promises.

The end of Malachi describes the coming Day of the Lord. This day will be a day of judgment for God to remove the wicked from among his people. God also reminds his people that he is sending a better Moses and better Elijah, who will restore his people to him and heal their hearts from their sin.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Imagine an evil person who is filthy rich. This person lives in the biggest house, has the coolest clothes, drives the nicest cars, yet you know they steal and cheat to get their way. Most of the money they have has been stolen, yet they've never been caught. You decide it's not worth following the rules anymore because evil people like them get whatever they want no matter if you follow the rules or not. You decide to stop obeying the law and end up with a rebellious, hardened heart toward those in authority over you. Your ruler graciously pursues you, asks you to come back to him, and promises to provide all that you need.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

Malachi 1:1-5: The Care of God—Past

Malachi 1:6-3:15: The Complaint of God—Present

Malachi 3:16-4:6: The Coming of God—Future

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The book of Malachi has an underlying theme of the hope of the coming Messiah. In Malachi 3, the author states that a messenger (John the Baptist) is coming who will prepare the way for the Lord (Jesus). Then, in Malachi 4:2, Jesus' coming is confirmed by this verse, "but for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." Jesus did come with "healing in his wings." Being fully man and fully God, Jesus physically healed people on earth (and can still today), but most importantly, he made a way for people to be spiritually healed by paying the price for our sins on the cross and bringing us back into a right relationship with God. One day, Christ will return and bring complete healing and restoration to his people, just like Malachi promises.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF INSERT NAME OF BOOK HERE

OBSERVATION

- Author: Malachi (most likely)
- Context: The events in Malachi occur 100 years after the Israelites return from the Babylonian exile between 450 and 430 BC.
- Structure: Malachi is divided into three main parts. Chapters 1-2 focus on Israel's corruption. Chapter 3 examines Israel's rebellion. Chapter 4 describes the Day of the Lord.
- Literary style: Malachi uses poetry and narrative elements.

INTERPRETATION

- Literary context: The minor prophets are written to be read as a unified context. The prophets were written to explain Israel's rebellion against God and give hope and restoration for the future. The prophets affirm the coming of the Messiah to save the Israelites from their sin.
- Narrative context: It is most likely that Malachi wrote the book of Malachi 100 years after the Israelites had returned from the Babylonian exile. His message was directed toward the people who had been living in Jerusalem. The temple has already been rebuilt, but the Israelites were still living in sin. The Israelites' patience for the coming Messiah ran short and the people started being unfaithful to God again.
- Historical context: Malachi is writing to the people of Judah at the time of the Persian government ruling over the Promised Land. This time frame is after the temple had been rebuilt. It is likely Malachi prophesied after Nehemiah left the city of Jerusalem.
- Cultural context: Malachi is the final book of the Old Testament, meaning he was the last prophet who spoke before the coming of the Messiah 400 years after his book was written. The Israelites—God's chosen people, Abraham's descendants, and inheritors of the Jewish traditions—had experienced blessing and judgment from God. This book is the final statement of judgment for the Israelite people who were still straying from his path. Malachi reminded the people of God's coming Messiah who would save them.

APPLICATION

- Read in light of Christ.
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to repent from?
- Is there a promise to cling to?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid?

PRAYER

- Pray for a heart that is receptive to God's Word.
- Pray to guard yourself against fighting for justice on your own, without God.
- Pray for diligence to honor and serve the Lord all the days of your life.

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The book of Malachi is used in church history because of its practical outline of Israel's rebellion and God's mercy. Malachi along with the other prophets, emphasized the heart of God's rebellious people, their need for repentance, and God's justice and steadfast love. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament before there are 400 years of silence with no Scripture written. Malachi specifically encourages readers to look forward to the coming Messiah and the coming Day of the Lord. The Church has used Malachi to know God's last words before he sent Jesus to earth.

“Malachi addressed the covenant community of Israel during a time of great discouragement and disarray following its return from exile in Babylon. Although heirs of the prophetic promises of restoration, God’s people lacked any sense of his love (1:2–5). Their worship was impure and dishonoring (1:6–2:9). Spiritual betrayal disrupted the community, especially its marriages (2:10–16). God’s people neglected the tithe (3:6–12) and considered God’s cause futile (2:17–3:5; 3:13–4:3). Malachi set about repairing the covenant relationship in two ways: by calling the community to renewed obedience to the Mosaic covenant, and by describing the coming “day of the LORD” (4:5; cf. 3:1–5; 4:1–3), when God would bring justice and restoration to his people.”

—Eric Ortland, *ESV Expository Commentary*

“The book of Malachi serves a prophetic bridge to John the Baptist and Jesus, who both used many of Malachi’s themes in their preaching. The portrayal of the religious leaders at the time of Christ suggests that Israel had failed to respond to the basics of Malachi’s message.

“Sometimes it is difficult to see how the prophets are relevant to us today since their messages were directed toward Israel. However, when we break the prophetic message down to its basics, we see that the prophets indicted the people for unfaithfulness, oppression of the defenseless, misplaced reliance, confused priorities, and improper treatment and understanding of God. Though we may not commit these offenses in the same way, we are guilty of them nonetheless. In the judgment oracles we learn that God is serious about sin, especially the sin of his people—and he will act.”

—“Malachi,” *The Essential Bible Companion*

CITATIONS

<https://research.lifeway.com/2019/09/10/6-ways-to-study-the-minor-prophets/>

<https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/malachi>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/sun-of-righteousness.html>

<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-malachi/>

