

## **The Message of the Minor Prophets**

### **The message of Malachi**

*[Please note: New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Introduction**

The book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. We have no other information about Malachi other than his name. His name means messenger. This is not to distract from the solemn message which Malachi brings from Jehovah. The Scriptures used in this talk are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

#### **Chapter 1**

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi (1 v. 1).

This message is not made up by Malachi, it comes directly from the LORD. It is described as a burden because of its content and was intended as a wakeup call to the nation. It is a word to the whole nation Israel, which Jehovah ever had in mind, even though the vast majority were not living back in the land. Malachi lived during the return of a remnant from captivity. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had stirred up the people to rebuild the temple and this was done under the guidance of Ezra. The walls of the city were then rebuilt under the control of Nehemiah. But as we consider Malachi the people had once again lost interest in giving Jehovah His proper place in their lives. Therefore Malachi has a restorative message for those who would listen.

I have loved you, says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness." Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places," thus says the LORD of hosts: "They may build, but I will throw down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever. Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, 'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel' (Malachi 1 vv. 2-5).

We now have a series of dialogues between Jehovah and the people spoken through Malachi. The first is in the above quoted verses. The challenge is at the beginning of verse 2, "I have loved you." The people's response doubts what Jehovah had said. "In what way have you loved us?" So the historical account of Jacob and Esau is used to illustrate this very point, "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated." We find in Genesis that Jacob was desirous after the firstborn blessing whereas Esau did not value such things. Throughout the Old Testament Esau and his descendants were a constant adversary to Israel. Naturally speaking Jacob did not have any characteristics that made him a lovable person, he was a schemer through and through. But it is true of us all we were not lovable because we were sinners, yet Christ died for us and through faith in His marvellous work we have been saved and brought into the joys of salvation.

Because of Jehovah's rejection of Esau He laid waste the dwelling places of Edom. But the nation Edom just like Esau, the head of the nation, fought against Jehovah and declared that they would rebuild. However, Jehovah has the last word in that He would throw down their rebuilding efforts, all would be in vain. Jehovah would be angry with Edom forever and Jehovah will be great even beyond the border of Israel.

### **The sins of the Priests.**

Verse 6 brings before us the challenge to the priests. "Where is my honour", said Jehovah? When the priest query this. Jehovah states that they were not honouring Him and verse 7 tells us why. They were offering contaminated bread. Bread which they would not eat themselves. Then verse 8 follows in the same theme. The priests offered the worst of animals on the altar. The sick, blind, lame such that they would not dare to offer to the ruler of their country.

In verse 9 Malachi pleads with the priests that they should repent and turn to God and He would graciously forgive them. Because of their carnal state Malachi states it would be better for the doors to the temple to be shut than to kindle the fire upon the altar to stop the offering of what was despised. But there was no one spiritually sensitive to do so. Then Jehovah of Hosts ends the chapter and identifies the failure of the priests and the people that in their flocks they had animals which were healthy and fit for an offering, but they instead looked out for that which was lame and sickly to take as an offering. They knew what they were doing, despising God. This gave a bad testimony among the Gentiles. We too must not behave in a way that damages the Christian testimony whether as individuals or as companies of God's people. However, there will come a day when God will be held in awe because He is a great God, a great King and this will be known among all the nations of the world. Verse 11 states that from the rising of the sun to its setting His name shall be great and worshipped.

### **Chapter 2**

With chapter 2 Malachi's message continues to the priests. The language at the beginning of the chapter shows how seriously Jehovah takes the priests departure from undertaking what is right and due to Him. Not honouring their God would bring a curse upon them because they had not listened and taken to heart the call to repentance. So what offerings they were making the dung of which will be spread upon their faces so defiling them from serving as priests. The priests are then reminded that God had a covenant with Levi. The priests were from the tribe of Levi but limited to the family of Aaron. The rest of the tribe of Levi did, among other things, serve the priestly family. God's covenant with Levi is described as one of 'Life and Peace' because Levi revered God. By the time of Malachi's message Levi was a teacher of the law and was credited with turning many away from iniquity. The priests are told to listen to Levi, to be well instructed in the word of God. We do not have a Levitical family for Christians, but we do have those who are gifted to teach and explain the Scriptures for our encouragement that we might be strengthened in our faith. Sadly in Malachi's day the priests not only had departed from living right according to the law but had caused many to depart from, and stumble at, God's word. So it was that the people despised the priests.

From verse 10 Malachi's burden turns to focus upon the people. The social order was breaking down as the people were behaving in a manner of not trusting one another. They also broke what was commanded of them not to marry those connected with strange gods. This is a challenge to believers not to marry unbelievers. If you want a Christian home, then both partners need to be believers. But here in Malachi's message from Jehovah the warning is judgement will come upon such who fall into this trap. At the end of Solomon's life he not only had many wives, but they turned his heart away from Jehovah. He had started out very well, but the end of his life was a total disaster. As a result the people's offerings were not accepted in the eyes of Jehovah. Worship must go hand in hand with an appropriate moral state. True Christianity is not just for one day a week and then to live like the world for the other six days.

As we draw to the close of chapter 2 the sacredness of marriage is emphasised which for the nation was essential as Jehovah was looking for a godly nation. In addition Jehovah hated divorce. This was not the way to build a nation that would be acceptable to Him. Finally in the last verse we have another complaint from Jehovah that the people's words wearied Him. The people were now saying that those who do evil, that it is good. This is true of our day that those things Jehovah condemned are now an acceptable part of life in the world. As in Malachi's day so it is today, the world no longer fears a God of judgement.

### Chapter 3

Let us read chapter 3 v 1.

Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.  
And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even  
the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is  
coming, Says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3 v 1).

The first sentence in this verse speaks of John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus in Matthew 11 v 10 refers to John by quoting from Malachi. John the Baptist had the wonderful privilege of pointing out Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. However, we should note that the whole of Malachi 3 verse 1 may well be fulfilled in a future day when another will come in the character of Elijah with the same kind of message. Not then about the incarnate Christ but the One who comes to judge and establish His kingdom.

Verses 2-4 bring before us a future day when Levi will be cleansed to make them suitable to offer acceptable offerings on behalf of the tribe of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. Verse 5 sees the Lord coming to judge the wickedness that was going on in the land. In verse 6 we are reminded that the LORD does not change. He is ever holy and righteous, and He does not change His mind regarding the wickedness of this world. The world's values may change, and it is safe to say it is on a downward trend from a biblical perspective. But not only does Jehovah's character not change in relation to wickedness, but He does not change regarding the sons of Jacob, that is the nation of Israel. Grace is evident, for despite their failure they are not consumed.

Again the message is pressed home to this wayward people. Verse 7 reminds them that from the days of their fathers they had gone astray not keeping the ordinances given to them to keep and obey. "Return to Me", says Jehovah through the prophet, "and I will return unto you." But the people respond saying, 'How shall we return?' In other words they did not recognize their failure or need to return to the 'LORD of hosts', He had no place in their lives.

In verse 8 comes the next challenge that they had robbed God. But the people question how had they robbed God? The answer returns swiftly; it was in tithes and offerings. This in part is what supported the priests and the Levites, enabling them to function in the temple. Malachi's message from Jehovah was that the whole nation was cursed because of that. But there was still a way back to a right relationship with Jehovah. Verse 10 is an appeal to bring in the tithes to the temple storehouse that there may be provisions available in the temple. If this was done, then Jehovah's response would be an abundant blessing poured out from heaven, more than the nation could cope with. This is followed by a promise in verse 11 that Jehovah would also protect their crops. This will have an impact on the surrounding nations. They shall call them blessed. The land will be a delightful land. But again the nation failed to respond in a positive way. However, this will have its fulfilment in the Millennium when the Messiah reigns, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Malachi reminds us that the nation had only unpleasant words against their God. The millennial reign of Christ was not yet so the fulfilment of the above verses was some time away. The nation was still in the place of rejecting their God by their attitude. Let us read the verses 13 – 15.

Your words have been harsh against Me, says the LORD yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.' (Malachi 3 vv. 13-15)

It is a sad picture that Malachi paints. The nation had only to look at their past to see that when they were obedient the LORD made them prosper but when they strayed disaster came upon them. What lessons for us today when faithfulness is required in our Christian pathway.

Chapter 3 ends on a brighter note. Let us read verses 16 – 18.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Malachi 3 vv.16-18)

Most of the preceding verses up to this point give the impression that the whole nation had gone away from following Jehovah. However, as we read these verses, we see that Jehovah has a faithful remnant. Elijah in his day arrived at the point where he thought he was only one left faithful. But Jehovah informed him that there were still 7000 that had not followed Baal. We are not told how many remained faithful. But there were those who feared the LORD and encouraged one another. Feared does not mean afraid but rather they gave their God due reverence. The LORD has a book of remembrance noting their faithfulness. They gave themselves to meditating on the name of the LORD. For Christians it is being occupied with the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus.

But there is another blessing for these faithful ones. The promise that they would have a place of prominence, they will be considered Jehovah's jewels. No doubt given a place of prominence, was an answer for their faithfulness and would outweigh any suffering they may have had to endure. Others will lament because of their unfaithfulness and having to answer for the consequences of their actions. There will come a day when there will be a discerning between the righteous and the wicked and between those who serve God and those who did not. A day of righteous reckoning will surely come.

#### **Chapter 4**

We come to the last chapter of the book of Malachi. Let us read all the chapter.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts. "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the

children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.  
(Malachi 4 vv. 1-6)

Verse 1 gives a dreadful picture of judgement to come upon the unbelieving wicked of the nation. It is likened to a fire sweeping through the land destroying the proud and wicked just like a fire sweeping through a field of stubble in a farmer's field after the harvest. Again so devastating that this people will be totally consumed leaving neither root nor branch. There would be no recovery. Such will await the judgement of the 'Great white throne' when Christ will consign all the wicked to the 'Lake of Fire' the place of eternal punishment. Verse 2 starts with a but, a contrast is going to be made with those who feared the name of Jehovah. The glorious light of the "Sun of Righteousness" will shine forth upon the faithful remnant. They will be in a place of favour, flourishing like cattle kept and fed in stalls. Also they will be involved in the judgement upon the wicked trampling upon them. The church however waits for the Morning Star to shine forth before the sun rise. Believers are looking for the Saviour who will take them up to glory to be with Him forever, consider 1 Thessalonians 4 vv. 15-17.

Malachi speaks again to draw the people back to Jehovah, "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." If there is to be recovery for the nation, then they must go back to first principles when Jehovah had given them the Law through Moses. We can conclude that the nation had never kept the Law, and the Old Testament Scriptures confirm this. But Jehovah was going to send Elijah the prophet before the judgement comes upon the wicked that there may be recovery to Himself. God is a God of mercy, not willing that anyone should perish. We see this in our day of grace. The Gospel goes out to all that there might be a response in the hearts of people to accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour. But if there is no response then judgement will fall. So Malachi's message ends on a most solemn note abruptly at the end of verse 6, "Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." This highlights for us how important is the proclamation of the Gospel.

Before we leave the end of this prophecy, we should consider Matthew 17:10-13, the disciples' question and the Lord's answer to them about Elijah coming first. The disciples frequently had in mind the restoring of the nation of Israel. The scribes taught that Elijah would come first. The Lord stated that Elijah had come in the character of John the Baptist, but he had been rejected. As a result the Lord was also rejected and crucified. This would bring in the day of grace with a Gospel based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on the cross as the sin bearer. So making salvation freely available to whoever believes on Him and not a matter of works that the Law demanded.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on "The Message of the Minor Prophets, Malachi" talk number T1444.

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