

Malachi

Summary

In this last book of the Old Testament, a final prophet emerges to confront the people of Israel on God's behalf. Heeding the call of Haggai and Zechariah, God's people completed the rebuilding of the temple but without the result that they were anticipating. Under the assumption that the newly erected temple would bring the Messiah with it, the Israelites were sorely disappointed when no such Savior rose up. Unwilling to persevere and trust God's perfect timing, the Israelites dove into depression and half-hearted living. In the complacency, worship became corrupt, giving neglected, and divorce prevalent. Yet even in this dark time, God still showed compassion on His people. The prophet Malachi, whose name means "messenger," was sent to bring a call to repentance and ultimately bring hope for the future. The message of Malachi not only taught God's people how to live as they waited, but it predicted and promised the coming of John the Baptist, and most importantly the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Author

This book is ascribed to the prophet Malachi, whose name means "my messenger." He prophesied to the post-exilic Jews living in Judah after the rebuilding of the temple.

Date

The date given by most scholars for the book of Malachi is around 433 B.C. This was the last book added to the canon of Scripture before the "400 years of silence" that preceded the birth of Jesus.

Primary Characters

Malachi (Malachi 1-4)

Priests of Israel (Malachi 2)

Historical Moments

The Temple Is Finished under Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. (Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah)

Four Hundred Years of Silence (Following Malachi)

Major Theological Themes

God Desires and Deserves Our Best - God speaks through Malachi to bring several messages of correction to His people. One of these exhortations revolves around the sacrifices being offered by the priests at the temple. The people of Israel are not bringing their best to God and He is not pleased. Throughout Malachi, we are reminded that God is great and worthy of praise. Even though He is patient and kind to His people, He is still the God of the universe and desires and deserves to be treated as the King over all.

A Loving God Disciplines His Children - God is a good father, and good fathers discipline their children when they are causing themselves harm. Israel's morality was plummeting rapidly, and God intervened through Malachi to inform Israel that some of the pain and hardship they were encountering was purposeful discipline from God. When bad things happen, it is not always a result of God's hand of discipline. For Israel at this time, God was letting His people suffer the consequences of their behavior so they would learn and repent.

God Is Faithful, Even When His People Are Not - Throughout the message brought by Malachi, the most predominant theological theme is the Lord's faithfulness. While much of his message must have been difficult for Israel to hear, there is an important theological truth that permeates the entire book. Even in the midst of Israel's unfaithfulness on all fronts, God was still there, and He was still faithful. Israel's behavior did not warrant God's faithfulness, but God's faithfulness is not based on man's obedience. The story of the book and of Scripture as a whole can be summed up in man's wandering met by God's faithfulness.

Lessons Learned from Malachi

Give Your Best to God - It is easy to see where the Israelites were falling short with their giving, offering blind and lame animals for sacrifices instead of the strongest ones. By saving their best for themselves and their own purposes, they were declaring what they truly believed about God's worth. What does our giving reflect about our view of God's worth? We no longer offer animal sacrifices to God, but we still offer Him our time, money, and devotion. If we believe God is worth it, we will give Him our best.

Reject the Temptation to Grumble - Complaining is easy and often feels very satisfying. In Malachi's day, Israel fell into the trap of grumbling, much as their ancestors did in the time of wandering the wilderness under Moses. Now that Israel was again in the Promised Land and worshipping in the temple, they did not give up in their complaining, but simply found other things to complain about. Throughout the book, God corrects their grumbling hearts and points them back to fear of the Lord as the substitution. Today, we could all benefit from replacing some of our daily complaints with more talk of the greatness and glory of God.

Reevaluate Your Faithfulness to God - While it is true that God will always be faithful to His people even in our unfaithfulness, this is by no means an excuse to live a life where our devotion to God is lacking. Instead, we should take books like Malachi and use them to realign our faithfulness to God by setting the same moral standards up for ourselves that God set for His people so long ago. Am I living a life of justice? Do I choose to worship or to grumble? Am I giving my best to God? By putting ourselves in Israel's shoes, we can realign our hearts to better match the faithfulness that God graciously pours out on us.