

Malachi: A Chapter by Chapter Study

Introduction

The word 'Malachi' means 'my messenger'. It is unclear if this is actually the author's name or if this is simply a title attributed to the author.

It is believed that since Malachi addresses some of the same issues that are addressed in the book of Nehemiah that this was written soon after Nehemiah was governor. Malachi is traditionally accepted as the last book written in the Old Testament although there are arguments for the book of Joel being last. Malachi is often referred to as a supplement to the rebukes of Nehemiah.

The main purpose of this writing is to remind the captive Jews that God will come to rebuke and judge, but He will primarily come to bless and restore them.

Chapter 1

V1-5

Malachi opens the book with the declaration of God's love. This is first and foremost of all the statements made in this book. The rest of the book discusses how the Jews showed love or a lack of love to God.

Malachi uses a back-and-forth conversational method to get his points across. Even this first statement of God's love is questioned.

How often do we ask God why bad things happen or why something did or didn't take place if He really loves us?

Malachi refers to the Jews as God's chosen people by pointing out that Jacob was chosen over Esau and that comparatively the Edomites have suffered greater than the Jews throughout history. This is just one example of God's favor.

It is also not known to us why God does the things He does. Just because something bad is happening to us doesn't mean that God doesn't love us. Sometimes they are trials, sometimes it may be so someone else can learn from us and other times we may never know the reason but for some future happenstance. Job, Joseph, and Daniel are just some examples.

Does it seem harsh to think that God 'hated' someone? Why would Jacob be favored over Esau?

A study of Jacob and Esau would reveal that Jacob had a heart more toward God than Esau did much like the heart of David later in the Old Testament. One commentary pointed out that it isn't a matter of how God could hate Esau, but how could God love any of us.

V6-8

What does it mean when it is asked, "Where is My honor?"

The Jewish priests and people in general had become complacent in their duties. Their sacrifices no longer were of the highest quality and they treated God with less respect than they did their own government or employers.

Read 2 Samuel 24:24. King David had the correct attitude towards offerings to God. Instead of taking the weak, lame or sick animals to burnt offerings, only the choice animals should be offered.

Do we always give our best to God?

V9-11

What does it mean to 'shut the doors'?

God wants us to worship with whole hearts and because we desire to worship. Going through the motions does nothing for us or for God. It would be better to seal the temple shut than to worship half-heartedly.

Why does God want our best?

Sometimes being a Christian and in particular a Jew from this time period can seem time consuming, boring and even not worth the effort. But God gives us His best. Jesus gave His life. Our lives should reflect that kind of love. That is the whole point of worship and in fact living.

V12-14

In these verses, God says that those who are going through the motions and not giving their best are to be cursed. They would be better off not worshipping at all.

Chapter 2

V1-4

What is God saying here?

The priests have not only become complacent, but contemptible. God is threatening to remove the priesthood.

What does the term, 'spread refuse on your faces' mean?

Read Exodus 29:14. There were instructions on how to deal with the carcass of sacrificed animals. An animal would still have excrement which had to be dealt with and that would be done outside of the temple. God is saying the priests will have no place inside the temple because they are as filthy as dung. God does not want to do this, but if this is what is necessary to teach the priesthood a lesson and 'continue the covenant of Levi' then this is what will happen.

V5-9

God is describing Levi and what a priest should be like in comparison with who the priests are now. A priest should be reverent, knowledgeable of the Word of God and his character should reflect that reverence and knowledge. Instead the priests caused many to fall away. Not only God, but the people also held priests in contempt.

V10-12

These verses deal directly with marriage and are often used as a reference for how much God considers marriage a serious and holy institution. This speaks directly to those that have married outside of their faith and are 'unequally yoked'. One commentator pointed out that when we break or dishonor our marriage we break and dishonor something that God loves.

In verse 12, the term ‘awakes and answers’ (NASB) is used. *What do other translations say? What does it mean by this?* The original Hebrew translation is a term for ‘all people’ or ‘everyone’.

V13-16

What does the phrase ‘cover the altar in tears’ mean?

The same altar that the priests performed sacrifices and burnt offerings on was the same altar used by their wives who had been neglected, mistreated or even divorced to beg for mercy and repentance from God.

What does it mean to ‘cover one’s garment with violence’?

Read Ephesians 5:28. Malachi and Paul are both referencing the same Jewish marriage ceremonial ritual of the groom covering the bride with his garment in a symbol of protection and unity. For a husband to do ill towards his wife is to do ill to himself.

V17

What does this verse mean?

This is a separate example of another treachery committed by the Jews. Although brief, it is filled with implications of how we perceive the works of God. It is human nature to compare ourselves to other people. Our appearance, our behavior, our wealth and status are all common measuring sticks. God grows tired of our begging Him to give us what other people have or put us in better situations than our enemies. The commandment “Do not covet” speaks directly to this.

Chapter 3

V1-7

Who is the messenger?

Both Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27 refer to this passage to describe John the Baptist as the Messenger of Christ. A messenger was to announce the coming of the king, clear the path of any obstacles and prepare the route for his coming. John the Baptist fills this role for Jesus.

Some scholars believe that Malachi is mixing the two comings of Christ, His first arrival and the second coming which would explain some of the descriptions in this passage.

What does the phrase, “I am the Lord, I do not change” mean?

Most believe this to refer to a constant God who keeps his promises. We are not ‘consumed’ because God chooses to love us and honor his promise of not wiping us off the face of the earth like He did in the time of Noah.

Notice that there is no answer to the question ‘In what way shall we return?’ Some commentaries believe this to mean that the Jews either chose to ignore the laws set before them or they had been in captivity so long that they didn’t feel that they knew how even after Ezra and Nehemiah showed them the way. Malachi continues his rebuke to further show them the way.

V8-12

This section is an oft quoted passage due to the fact that this is one of the few times if not the only time that God asks His followers to challenge Him in His promise. Tithing is a command, but it is so often abused and neglected. Here, Malachi compares not tithing to robbery.

What is the reward for tithing?

God promises rewards for those that follow His command, but it does not necessarily mean monetary rewards. Overflowing blessings and protection from evil are the promised reward.

V13-15

What is the harshness that is referred to here?

Malachi is reminding the Jews that they often compare themselves with their enemies and they see how much better off some of their enemies are than they. Why worship God if there is no benefit? Yet the benefit of worshipping God should be contentment in our situation, not materiel riches for us to covet.

V16-18

Malachi is describing to them the joy that God has when His people get together and encourage one another.

What is the 'book of remembrance'?

This refers to an idea that God writes down that which He finds worthy and rewards those whose names are written in it. Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:23, 87:6 and Daniel 12:1 are some examples.

Chapter 4

V1-6

God promises that justice for the wicked and rewards for the righteous are coming. We as humans often do not see the big picture of eternity and can be distracted by the 'now'.

What does it mean to 'remember the law of Moses'?

The Jews felt like they had been abandoned by God so they stopped worshipping and following the laws already set aside not realizing that this would push them even further from God. There are times when God will be silent, but that doesn't mean He has left us without instruction or even left us alone. He is always with us and He has already told us what to do.

What is the reference to Elijah the Prophet about?

Some believe this to again refer to John the Baptist. Others believe this to still be unfulfilled until the second coming of Christ.

Verse 6 closes the Old Testament with a warning of a curse. Many Jewish customs repeat verse 5 after verse 6 or switch the two verses when reading this closing so as not to end on such a dark note.

References

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/malachi/>

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