

What's the Point....of Malachi?

Mark Garner

The book of Malachi is written after Ezra and Nehemiah had come to Judah, taught the Judeans about God's words, rebuilt the city walls, and instituted a number of reforms. About 25 years later, new problems have arisen; the prophet will use these to show us the need we all have for God to forgive and cleanse us, and in turn this leads him to give us a look ahead to the coming of Jesus.

The Messenger Of The Covenant (Overview Of Malachi)

As Malachi addresses some of the people who have drifted away from God, he also tells us about the covenant of life and peace that God wants to make with each of us (Malachi 1-2). The book opens with the Lord reassuring them, and us, that he has loved us and loves us. God understands how easy it can be to become distracted and drift away from him without realizing it.

Over time, some of the Judeans had begun to use diseased or injured animals as sacrifices. Through the prophet, God points out that they wouldn't do this for an important human, and God is far greater than any human ruler or celebrity. Human nature had led them to drift in this way; and sometimes discouragement or distractions can lead us to go through the motions in worshiping God. God patiently reminds us simply to return to him with our hearts, and remain in Jesus.

Our Heavenly Father then reminds them that his covenant calls for devotion and faithfulness (chapter 2). He also reminds them that each of us belongs to him, and calls us to treat one another with this in mind.

Next, Malachi tells us about the coming of the messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3-4). The imagery is encouraging to our spirits, yet at the same time it reminds us that none of us can stand before God by our deeds, knowledge, or possessions. So our Heavenly Father reassures us that his Son came to refine us and purify us, so that we may be close with God.

After he discusses some of their spiritual struggles, God reassures them simply to return to him and walk by faith in reverence and humility. He uses the image of writing about them in a scroll of remembrance, calling them his treasured possession (3:16-17). Similarly, the New Testament tells us of his "book of life" that contains the names of those who recognize the voice of Jesus and follow him.

The final chapter of the Old Testament promises that to those who seek God in truth, he will be like a sun of righteousness, rising with healing and radiance and hope. The imagery of the contented calves also reminds us of the quiet joy of knowing that God is near, regardless of what may happen in this world. The book closes with the prophecy of the "Elijah-like" figure who would come to proclaim the coming of Jesus.

About 400 years after the book of Malachi ends, the Son of God came to live like one of us, bringing the good news of God's redemption and salvation. The Lamb of God and his message of grace and truth would fulfill in many ways the words of the writers of the Old Testament.

What's the Point....of Malachi?

Caleb Dillinger

Malachi is the final book of the Old Testament, and thematically works well to flow from Old to New Testament. Over four hundred years pass from the time of Malachi to the time of Jesus, and the teachings of Malachi reveal some key reasons God is disappointed in his people, but also provides hope for the future because of the love of God, which makes it particularly relevant for believers to continue reading today.

Malachi is composed of four short chapters. Chapter 1 is an imagined conversation between Israel and God, where Israel is implied to be feigning innocence and God is charging them with sin. Chapter 2 addresses the priests in particular, who should have been guiding the people, but instead turned to sin. Chapter 3 predicts a future messenger, as well as portrays God's justice and accuses the Israelites of their sins some more, but with the hope of calling people to righteousness and repentance. Chapter 4 concludes with a depiction of the day of the Lord, and a final call to obey the teachings of God and look for his messengers.

Malachi echoes much of what the other minor prophets teach: repent of sin, particularly the sin of pride, and follow God's teachings. It's remarkable how often that theme flows through the Bible, and yet it is presented in new and compelling ways. For instance, Malachi 1 makes the argument that you would not offer lame sacrifices to human leaders, so why does Israel find it acceptable to offer lame sacrifices to God? Is God lower than human leaders? Malachi 2 addresses the role of spiritual leaders and points out how when spiritual leaders stumble, it affects the people of God. These are not new themes but presented in new ways to continue humbling and teaching God's people.

But Malachi is not only doom and gloom. The prophet portrays God as the loving father who spares his son (Malachi 3:17). Malachi describes God as the God who will defeat the evildoers (Malachi 4:1). God will heal those who fear his name and God himself will act in the world (Malachi 4:2-3). There is hope. Hellfire and brimstone messages only work when there is also the reminder of hope in God. Malachi delivers God's message of hope to fallen people.

The point of reading Malachi today is that the church, God's people, should not become so comfortable that they treat God less than their human leaders, or neglect the spiritual practice of sacrifice and service. Nor should spiritual leaders be arrogant, but rather focus on humility and righteousness. When God's people look to God, they will indeed find a God who loves and acts.