

Malachi Speaks Again Part 1

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This is the latest in our series on the minor prophets called “The Prophets Speak Again.” As in the past, we’ll take a message from the Lord to ancient Israel and see if there’s a parallel application in our world today. But first let’s get a little better acquainted with Malachi.

The name Malachi means “my messenger.” Very little is known about him, and some even speculate that Malachi was a title rather than a name, making the book’s author unknown. But most say he was a real person, a prophet who spoke to Israel for God somewhere between 433-425 BC. That would place his time of service after those of Haggai and Zechariah, during the early days of the Second Temple period.

According to Jewish history, a man named Malachi was a member of the Great Assembly, a body of 120 leaders who were the ultimate authority in Israel at that time. He was most likely the same Malachi whose book we’re about to read.

(The second Temple is often called Herod’s Temple but it was originally built under the direction of Zerubbabel following the return from Babylon. The first Temple, built by Solomon, had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

Zerubbabel’s Temple was expanded during the Hasmonean dynasty (140-116 BC), but in 20 BC King Herod began such a dramatic renovation project that it was swallowed up in the grandeur of his reconstruction, and that’s when the Second Temple became known as Herod’s Temple.)

The Jews of Malachi’s time had lost hope in the promises God had made through Haggai and Zechariah. These included a promise that the glory of Zerubbabel’s Temple, which was a much more modest structure than Solomon’s Temple, would be greater than the one it replaced and would be the place where God would grant peace (**Haggai 2:9**). He said henceforth He would always bless them (**Haggai 2:19**) and He said He would return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem (**Zechariah 7:3**) as king of the whole world (**Zechariah 14:9**).

We now know that some of these were fulfilled in the Lord’s first coming while others await His return. But in Malachi’s time the people felt they were overdue for fulfillment and began to doubt whether God was sincere.

By the time Malachi came on the scene this doubt had led to rampant corruption in the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people. They became focused on their difficult circumstances and refused to see that their own sinfulness was the cause of their problems. Malachi’s task was to call them to account for their lack of faith. After all, it had been over 1,000 years since God had made His covenant with Abraham and their history was filled with the evidence of His faithfulness.

Most experts believe that Malachi was the last prophet of Old Testament times. After his time of service was completed a 400 year silence followed, ending when John the Baptist came on the scene to herald the coming Messiah. With that, let’s begin our study of the Book of Malachi

Malachi 1 - An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. Israel Doubts God’s Love

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.” Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.” *But this is what the Lord Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’* (Malachi 1:1-5).

God used the contrast in His treatment of Esau and Jacob as evidence of His love for Israel. No matter what the descendants of Esau did to restore themselves, He would destroy it, and they would be known as the Wicked Land. Yet He had been actively involved in Israel's restoration in the Promised Land. Even though their sins against Him had brought about their judgment and 70 year captivity, He sent Cyrus the Persian to free them. And under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah He had brought them back to the land He had given their forefathers and helped them rebuild both their temple and their city.

Those who teach that people have no choice about being saved like to use Romans 9:13, which is a quote from Malachi 1:2-3, to justify their position. They say it proves that God can choose whoever He wants to and reject whoever He wants to, and man is in no position to object. And when Paul continued by saying, "*It does not depend on man's desire or effort but on God's mercy*" (Romans 9:16) they say it confirms their position.

But they ignore the fact that God was not talking about our salvation in Romans 9, he was defending God's choice of Israel as His people. No one would argue that by selecting Abraham God was exercising His right of sovereign election, but that fact has nothing to do with how Gentiles become part of the Church. The Bible could not be any clearer in saying that accepting the Lord's death as payment in full for our sins is a choice any of us can make (Matt. 7:7-8, John 3:16, Romans 10:13, etc).

And God did not always hate Esau. In fact, when Jacob and Esau split over the way Jacob got the bulk of Isaac's inheritance, God gave Esau the land we know as Edom. We learn this from Deut. 2:1-6 where God told Moses He had given the territory they were about to enter to the descendants of Esau, and would not let the children of Israel have any of it. He told Moses to be very careful not to provoke them, and to pay them for any food and water they consumed while passing through Edom.

From Ezekiel 35 we learn that God was driven to everlasting hatred against Edom because of the way they treated Israel during the time of the conquests of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. They helped Israel's enemies overcome them and then moved in to take possession of the promised land, all because they harbored an ancient grudge against God's people. Notice how God said they harbored an ancient grudge. You never hear about God harboring a grudge about it. Jacob was a conniver but in Genesis 25:29-34 we see that Esau despised his birthright and brought the loss of it upon himself.

Breaking Covenant Through Blemished Sacrifices

"A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' "By offering defiled food on my altar.

"But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty. "*Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?*"—says the Lord Almighty. (Malachi 1:6-9)

There were two things wrong here....

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