

MALACHI - PART 1

A. OVERVIEW

1. Why study Malachi 2400 years later ?

a. Parallels between then and now

- 1.) Believers are called on to believe God's Word without miraculous confirmation
- 2.) Doubt about God was deep, as it is now
- 3.) Believers then waited on the Messiah's 1st coming, we wait on His Second Coming
- 4.) Their faith waxed and waned, as did their living according to God's will, so does ours
- 5.) Religious worship had become a dead ritual, as it has for many today

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2. Understanding the historical background & culture of the time

a. Babylonian Exile was over, returnees came back over 110 years

[Show timeline chart]

- 1.) Many accomplishments made to reestablish the nation
 - a.) Temple was rebuilt
 - b.) Sacrificial system reinstated
 - c.) Walls of Jerusalem completed

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2.) Yet the mood of the nation was not upbeat

- a.) People were in a constant state of depression
- b.) It also affected the priests
- c.) Consequently, religion became a matter of ritual
- d.) Stinginess toward God grew

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b. Why had this happened after the nation rebuilding positives ?

- 1.) Prophets Haggai & Zechariah would surpass Solomon's (Hagg 2.1-9)
- 2.) The people concluded that this could only happen by the Messiah coming & taking residence in the temple
- 3.) Years passed without something miraculous happening, fostering the sense of skepticism and depression
- 4.) By Malachi's time, this had been going on for over 100 years

3. As a result, the people faded on their covenant relationship with God

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(CONTD')

- a. They maintained religious observances with little enthusiasm
- b. The priests brought defiled sacrifices to God, complained about how tiresome the rituals were
- c. The people ignored laws about marriage and tithes
- d. They began to regard service to God as having no meaning
- e. All nearly lost their faith in a coming Messiah

4. Sound much like today ??

5. God's response was to hold a dialogue with the people through Malachi

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- a. This technique does not occur with God operating through any of the other prophets
- b. There are seven dialogues
 - 1.) God addresses the people in the first person
 - 2.) He confronts the people and the priests with their sins
 - a.) God makes His accusations
 - b.) The people object
 - c.) God refutes their objections
- c. God also affirms that the Messiah is coming
 - 1.) When He does, it will not be a good event for sinful people

B. THE OPENING DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE

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- (Mal 1.1) Malachi declares God is speaking
- a. 1st, Malachi declares why he is speaking
 - 1.) "oracle" = "burden" of speaking the Lord gave him
 - a.) He couldn't help but deliver what the Lord was saying to the people
 - b.) He felt the burden God put on him to address his people and their sins against God
 - b. 2nd, Malachi indicates that God is speaking directly to the people
 - 1.) After the return from the Exile, the nation was no longer divided, so all Israel was being addressed by God
 - c. 3rd, Malachi is delivering a prophecy directly from God
 - 1.) "Malachi" = My messenger
 - 2.) He gets all this out in the 1st verse

2. (1.2-4) God cites His love for Israel to begin His complaint

a. God says to them "I have loved you"

- 1.) You can almost hear the pleading & sadness
- 2.) God had repeated this to Israel through Hosea, Isaiah, and other prophets
- 3.) But the people kept rejecting His leadership
- 4.) We should pause to personally consider those words
 - a.) God says to each of us "I have loved you"
 - b.) It first applied to us as sinners
 - c.) Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, the proof of that is finalized at the Cross

b. In response, the people challenge God with a request for proof ! "How have you loved us ?"

- 1.) The people's many decades of hardship had apparently caused them to forget the Lord's past blessings
- 2.) This produced:
 - a.) A distrust of God and His promises
 - b.) A challenge to His faithfulness to meet the terms of the covenant of Deuteronomy
 - c.) Distrust > loss of love > failure to have faith in Him

c. God cites His love for them by reminding them that they are His chosen people

1.) Of the two brothers, Jacob was chosen over Esau

- a.) Normally the elder is chosen to inherit the legacy

2.) God indicates He had a strong preference for Jacob

- a.) "hated" is a comparative term
- b.) Doesn't imply personal animosity toward Esau
- c.) Edom brought God's judgement by their hostile regard for Jacob and his descendants
 - They failed to acknowledge the grace of God to Israel and seek it for themselves

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- d. God also showed His love for Israel by how He blessed them
 - 1.) Israel was blessed with the Covenant land
 - 2.) But God made Edom a land of waste
 - a.) Jeremiah and Ezekiel both predicted Edom's desolation (Jer 49.7-8)
 - b.) Mountains became wastelands, roamed only by jackals
 - c.) Edomites attempted to rebuild, but God frustrated their efforts
 - d.) Driven out to the west by the Nabateans in the 4th century BC
 - e.) This oppression continued through the Macedonians, the Maccabees, the Romans and the Mohammedans

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- 3.) They would become known as "the wicked territory"
= "the border of wickedness"
 - a.) People assumed they had done some terrible wickedness for God to treat them this way

- 3. (1.5) But God promises an even better day for Israel
 - a. God is contrasting His love for Israel & His blessings on her with the wrath He spent on Edom's wickedness
 - b. Israel will some day come to understand that grace, and how it spread's to all the earth beyond Israel's borders
 - 1.) Some believe that day occurred with the Maccabean dynasty successfully challenging Greek rule, restoring some Israeli glory
 - 2.) But the real day began when Jesus came and triumphed over sin and the grave for all to accept and enjoy

C. GOD PRESSES HIS COMPLAINTS ON THE ISRAELITES

- 1. They dishonoured His Name
 - a. Their doubt for God's love for them showed their faith in Him had faded
 - b. Now God directly charged the religious leadership with dishonouring His Name
 - 1.) In ancient times, a person's name stood for his character
 - 2.) Questioning God's character directly attacked His Name
 - 3.) If the religious leadership doesn't respect God, why would the people be expected to ?

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- c. (1.6) God identifies Himself as Israel's Father
 - 1.) He asks what the proper respect for a father is, and answer that the son honors the father
 - a.) Giving respect
 - b.) Doing things to please the father
 - c.) Obeying the father's direction to please him'
 - d.) The same is true of honoring a master
 - 2.) But the priests had done things that did not honor God as the Father He is
 - a.) The Hebrew wording indicate that this had become a characteristic trait with them
 - b.) They disrespectfully again challenged God to show them where He thought they were not honoring Him
 - They rejected God's accusation !!
- d. (vs 7-8) God gives them the basis for His charge
 - 1.) Conducting sacrifices to cover sin were a priest's duty
 - 2.) But the priests were not bringing the best sacrifices
 - a.) The bread offered was defiled
 - Anything offered to God was called "bread"
 - The priests again pushed back and asked how was that was defiling God
 - God answered that it defiled God's table = altar to have a polluted sacrifice on it
 - b.) The sacrifices were blind, lame, faulty
 - Ceremonial law demanded the sacrifices to be without any blemishes
 - To place such defiled sacrifices on God's altar was to defile God's Name
 - 3.) Then the Lord hammered His point home by comparison
 - a.) Would they bring such as gifts to honor the governor ?
 - b.) That would be a risky business, but they have problem treating God that way !
 - 4.) Here's a good point for us to consider
 - a.) Would we have treated our employers as such ?
 - b.) Or friends and family ?
 - c.) What does that say about how we treat God in devotion and service ?? Do we give our best ?

2. His reaction to these insults

a. (1.9) Malachai chides the priests with sarcasm

- 1.) The Hebrew wording behind "entreat" means. "to soothe or make sweet the face of anyone."
- 2.) Do they think after these insults that God will listen to their prayers, regard their sacrifices favorably ??
- 3.) In fact, will He receive them at all ?

b. (1.10) God declares their worship to be worthless

- 1.) Remember that "worship" means "worth-ship", and God declares they have made it the opposite
- 2.) In fact, He wishes that someone would shut the doors of the temple to keep them out
 - a.) "...I am not pleased with you..." says it all
 - b.) God says that shutting down worship totally is better than having defiled worship
 - c.) "...nor will I accept an offering from you...."
-- The priests had forfeited their right to be worship leaders !
- 3.) This is reminiscent of the Lord's pronouncement against the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:15–16)
- 4.) Jesus declared what worship properly done is (John 4.24)
 - a.) "in spirit" = worship Him fully invested in Him with our hearts
 - b.) "in truth" = worship according to what is revealed about Him in His Word

c. (1.11) God concludes by proclaiming commitment to His Name

1.) The Lord says twice "My Name shall be great"

- a.) God is sinless, and is the only One Who can seek His glory
- b.) Remember that God made man for His glory
-- If we do not live to be used by Him for that purpose, He will seek it on His own

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- 2.) Israel did not allow God to gain His glory
- a.) So God turned His attention to achieving that through the Gentiles
 - b.) The Gentiles will so respond that God will receive glory "from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations..."
 - Some scholars say this occurred during the conversion of Gentiles in Christ's day
 - Others feel this refers to the dispersion of Jews during Malachi's day
 - c.) Under the Gentiles ...
 - "incense is going to be offered to My name" likely refers to prayers (Heb inferring habitual)
 - "offering that is pure", unlike what the priests did
 - What a rebuke to the priests that the Gentiles would do what they did not, and God will accept it
 - d.) There is a further implication here
 - Under the Mosaic system, any offering made outside the temple was illegal and unclean
 - But God's statement indicates that this system will be replaced by a worship system including Gentiles
 - God emphasizes His intent by again stating My name will be great among the nations
 - e.) God's glory peaks in the preaching of the gospel, and what God provided for all sinners at the cross
- 3.) God concludes by repeating His charges against Israel
- a. Earlier, God's charges against the priests were for their actions
 - b. Now He charges them for their attitudes
 - 1.) (vs 12a) They also say the Lord's table is polluted
 - a.) This attitude had carried into the entire sacrificial ritual
 - b.) Apparently they recognized that the whole situation was polluted, but did nothing about it ! > James 4.17
 - 2.) (vs12b) They complained about their food
 - a.) Part of priests' compensation was to take a portion of the sacrifices as food
 - b.) They complained that the Lord got the best part
 - c.) But who brought the defiled sacrifices and made the choices ?? They should blame themselves !
 - 3.) (vs13a) They regarded their work as tiresome
 - a.) They actually sniffed at it like it was something putrified to be despised

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- 4.) (vs13b) As stated before, they brought unworthy sacrifices
 - a.) They knew what the ceremonial law required, but they disdainfully failed to follow it
 - b.) Some sacrifices were "taken by robbery"
 - Stolen or obtained by fraud ?
 - Taken from predators after the kill ?
 - c.) God said "Should I receive that from your hand ?"
- 5.) (vs 14a) They collaborated with false worshippers
 - a.) Example given if of someone pledging an acceptable sacrifice while in need of the Lord's help
 - When the situation was past, the person would offer a lesser sacrifice that was not equal to what was vowed
 - b.) Apparently the priests were accepting games such as this in disobedience to the ceremonial laws
- 6.) (vs 14b) They failed to acknowledge God's greatness & glory
 - a.) His Name and glory was held in awe among all nations
 - b.) But His priests failed to honor Him and His laws at all

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- 4. God then announces His curse on the priests
 - a. (2.1) God aims a decision as a curse against the priests
 - 1.) Called a "commandment" because God decided it
 - b. (2.2) God issues a curse on the priests
 - 1.) The curse is on "their blessings", which has already occurred
 - a.) It would be on their livelihood
 - If the people saw that defiled sacrifices were acceptable, they likely then brought that and less
 - b.) It would be on their respect among the people
 - The people already observed the religious ritual with disdain
 - The actions & attitudes of the priests lost them the respect of the people they were supposed to lead
 - 2.) Note "...if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name..".
 - a.) The curse, already in effect, was conditional
 - b.) They had the option of honoring God's Name by reversing the actions and attitudes described before

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- c. (2.3) God states the results that this curse will foster
- 1.) Their offspring will be rebuked
- a.) Can refer to the shame that will be brought on their children
 - b.) Can also refer to no positive results from their attempts to be respected by and lead the people
 - c.) The Hebrew word "zera" = descendants might have been "zeroa" = arm
 - In this case, they would lose their power in blessing the people
- 2.) They would be disposed of
- a.) "refuse" = "offal" = animal remains not useful for anything
 - b.) Just as it was disposed of, so the priests would be removed from office
 - c.) Worse, God would be humiliated by being carried off and put on the dung heaps
- d. (2.4) God states the reasons for this harsh curse
- 1.) "Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you"
- a.) When all these things come true, then the priests will know that God had sent this curse to them
- 2.) He created a covenant with Levi, and would keep it
- a.) God is a faithful and truthful God
 - b.) It was necessary to remove the bad priests to do so

D. THREE COVENANTS HAVE BEEN BROKEN BY ISRAEL

1. The priestly covenant had become perverted

a. (2.5-7) The covenant's ideal

1.) A covenant is between two persons

- a.) God's part was to give Levi life and peace
- b.) Levi's part was to hold God in awe, and serve Him

2.) The service had several responsibilities

- a.) "True instruction was in his mouth" > incorruptible doctrine
 - They were to teach only God's truth as written in His Law
- b.) "...unrighteousness was not found on his lips"
 - Their judgements were to fit only God's Law and not tainted with their own opinions
- c.) "...he walked with Me in peace and uprightness"
 - He was devoted to God in all things
 - His life was to be pure in every way
- d.) "...he turned many back from iniquity"
 - His instruction and guidance would turn many away from sin
- e.) "...the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge"
 - He was to study the Law and teach it faithfully
 - Part of it involves ceremonial law
 - But it also includes knowing and following God
- f.) "...men should seek instruction from his mouth"
 - He should be honored in his profession
 - He is the messenger of the God of hosts

b. (2.8-9) But the covenant ideal had been broken by the priests

- 1.) "you have turned aside from the way" > perverse in their lives
- 2.) "you have caused many to stumble by the instruction"
 - a.) They had made the law a stumbling block by how they lived and taught
 - b.) This example led others to do the same
- 3.) "you have corrupted the covenant of Levi"
 - a.) They were unfaithful in living their part of the covenant
 - b.) God was not given the reverence that was their due
- 4.) "I also have made you despised and abased before all the people"
 - a.) God made them contemptible to the people in response to how they responded to Him
- 5.) "not keeping My ways"
 - a.) Neglecting their duty as God had laid it out in His covenant and commandments

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- 6.) "showing partiality in the instruction"
 - a.) They made judgements that were biased by their own opinions rather than strictly adhering to God's law

2. The national covenant had been broken

a. The covenant was formed by Exod 34.16 & Deut 7.3

- 1.) Israelites were forbidden to intermarry with people from any of the nations around them
- 2.) Ezra had forced the divorce of such marriages a few years before Malachi (Ezra 10.3.-5)
 - a.) Had become common practice among the returned exiles
 - b.) The people of Ezra's time followed through on the divorces, but the practice had returned

b. Malachi stated three critical results from this broken covenant

- 1.) (2.10) The covenant was defiled
 - a.) Malachi asks the rhetorical question of did not one common God create the nation of Israel
 - b.) He asks then if they are all one, why do they sin against each other by breaking the covenant (unnamed at this point)
 - The practice of international marriage was threatening the unity and foundation of the Hebrew faith
- 2.) (2.11) Malachi states the sin breaking the covenant
 - a.) Israelites had intermarried with women who worshipped other gods
 - b.) The danger was that it would lead the Israelites into idol worship
 - Since the sanctuary was mentioned, it is possible that these pagan women had become involved in temple worship somehow
 - c.) It was also a sin against God's explicit commandment to not do this because of that danger
- 3.) (2.12) Judgement was brought on Israel
 - a.) Any man who marries a pagan woman would have his line of succession cut off and may also die
 - b.) May also mean that they would lose their position in the nation of Israel
 - c.) Even if he brings sacrifices as an offering, this judgement will be pronounced

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3. The marriage covenant had been broken

a. Overview

- 1.) Marriage was instituted by God
- 2.) God's law governed the institute
- 3.) The people were guilty of unlawful marriages and unlawful divorces
 - a.) The only lawful divorce under Mosaic Law was if the woman was guilty of indecent behavior

b. Malachi's observations on the breaking of this covenant

- 1.) (2.13) Innocent people are hurt by unlawful divorce
 - a.) The results of breaking the covenant is given 1st in v13, and then followed by the sin causing it
 - b.) Scholars suppose the tears are from the wives who were displaced by pagan wives through divorce
 - c.) As a result of the covenant break, God was no longer regarding the offerings made at the altar
- 2.) (2.14) The sin causing the covenant break is now given
 - a.) The husbands objected to the charge that they were responsible for the broken covenants
 - Note the continuing spiritual insensitivity !
 - b.) The broken covenant is stressed, since it is a covenant with God, not just marriage
 - God had been a witness to their marriage, and entering the covenant
 - "Covenant" also refers to the fact that the wife was one of the covenant people of God
 - c.) The husbands had divorced the wives of their youth, treating them "treacherously"
 - They are reminded that the wives have been companions from their youth
 - Again, God was a witness to their treacherous treatment of their wives

- 3.) (2.15) Scholars regard this verse as the most difficult to translate in Malachi

a.) Alternatives to the 1st phrase

- "Did not One make them?"
 - .. Emphasizes the creative powers of God
- "Did not He [the LORD] make one?"
 - .. Refers to one wife ?
 - .. One child of Abraham (Isaac) ?
 - .. One flesh of man and woman in marriage ?
 - .. One covenant nation ?

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- b.) 2nd sentence even more difficult
 - Literal reading "And a remnant of the Spirit [or spirit] to him."
 - It appears that God is contrasting His faithfulness to Israel with individuals breaking the marriage covenant

- c.) Scholars consensus of vss 14-15
 - 1st phrase has double meaning
 - .. "Has He not made one people?"
 - .. "Has He not made the people one?"

 - 2nd phrase could read "and made them His spiritual remnant."
 - .. This could happen only if He filled them with His Holy Spirit
 - .. This did not happen until the future
 - .. But God was treating it as though it had already happened

 - Note middle phrase of vs 15
 - .. ESV: " And what was the one God seeking?"
 - .. NIV: "And why one?"
 - .. God is seeking godly offspring to be unified under God

- d.) A simpler consensus of vss 14-15
 - 1st phrase might mean
 - .. ESV: "Did he not make them one ...?"
 - .. NIV: "Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one?"
 - .. The questions posed this way seems to be, "Why did God make marriage between one man and one woman ? Why not many ?"

 - And the answer is...
 - .. NIV: "Because he was seeking godly offspring. "

 - And the reason is ...
 - ESV: "So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth"

 - .. The marriage covenant is there to protect the continued generations of faithful youth



- c. (2.16) God puts the final word on breaking the marriage covenant
 - 1.) Note the strong language God uses to describe His reaction to divorce
 - a.) The man's garment covering him symbolizes the marriage
 - God says divorce treats that "garment" with violence
 - 2.) This is the most explicit statement in the OT regarding divorce
 - a.) Expresses how much God is against divorce
 - b.) The Mosaic statements were given to actually protect the wife

(Deut 24.1-4)
 - c.) Jesus emphasized the same

(Matt 19.7-9)
- 3.) God reemphasized keeping faith in the marriage covenant to protect the nation

