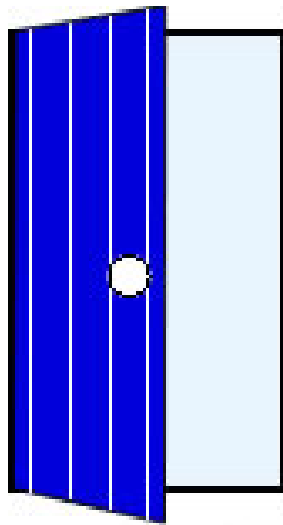


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

(1) Introduction

1) THE POSITION OF THE BOOK

The books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi deal with events following the return of God's people from their seventy-year exile in Babylon. This was a period of recovery, and subsequent decline. The rebuilding of the temple, described in the book of Ezra, was accompanied by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. This was followed by the rebuilding of the wall under the guidance of Nehemiah. It is in connection with this period that we should read the book of Malachi. There is a clear affinity between Nehemiah 13 and Malachi.

Malachi evidently preached after the era of Nehemiah, although commentators vary in opinion. Some place his ministry during the absence of Nehemiah from Jerusalem. Others place him even earlier in the period. J.B.Hewitt (*Outline Studies in the Minor Prophets*) observes: 'The book is not dated, but it bears every sign of belonging to the same period as Nehemiah. The abuses he attacks were just those common in Nehemiah's day.....The book of Nehemiah nowhere suggests the presence of Malachi, so we presume that he came on the scene at some later time. The godly influence of Nehemiah had passed, and the priests had become cool and formal, slovenly, deceitful and evasive, 1: 6-14; 3: 14. It was probably written between 424-400BC.' Spiritual conditions had evidently plummeted in the intervening period. The backsliding in Nehemiah 13 had accelerated. Notice the following comparisons:

Nehemiah 13	Malachi
The Levites were unsupported. The tithes not given, V10-14	"Yet ye have robbed Me in tithes and offerings", 3: 8.
The sabbath profaned, V15-22	"What profit is it that we have kept His ordinances, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts", 3: 14
Intermarriage with pagan neighbours, V23-29	"Judah.....hath married the daughter of a strange god", 2: 11.

The lesson is clear. Decline so easily, and so quickly, follows periods of recovery and progress. We need to be incessantly vigilant. About one hundred and fifty years ago there was another great recovery. Men and women began to meet together, recognising nothing but the Lordship of Christ, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and the sole authority and sufficiency of the word of God. In many places today, this recovery has been followed by decline, which makes the ministry of Malachi immensely relevant. Like Malachi, we live in 'last days.'

2) THE PEOPLE IN THE BOOK

A) The Messengers

There are five messengers in the book. **i)** Malachi himself. 1: 1. His name means 'my messenger.' **ii)** The true priest: "He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." 2: 7. **iii)** John the Baptist: "Behold, I will send My messenger", 3: 1. **iv)** Messiah Himself: "The messenger of the covenant", 3: 1. **v)** Elijah: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet", 4: 5.

B) "The Lord of Hosts"

The Lord Who **initiated** the covenant is the central figure and **chief spokesman**. Out of 55 verses, 47 record, in the first person, the address of the Lord to Israel. Notice that he is "a father" (1: 6), but "a great King" (1: 14). The first guards against **distance**: the second guards against **over-familiarity**.

There are 283 occurrences of the title, "Lord of hosts" (*'Jehovah Sabaoth*), in the Old Testament. The first reference is in 1 Samuel 1: 3. It occurs 53 times in Zechariah, and 24 times in Malachi. He is the Lord of all powers, seen and unseen, in the universe and in heaven. See Daniel 4: 35, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay His hand." We must notice Psalm 24:10, "Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory." This is none other but the Lord Jesus. Compare Ephesians 1: 20-21 and Colossians 1: 16. The same title occurs in the New Testament as "Lord of Sabaoth." See Rom. 9: 29 (quoting Isaiah 1: 9), and James 5: 4.

C) The Person of Christ

The Lord Jesus is presented to us in Malachi in two ways. **(i)** As the "Messenger of the covenant", 3: 1, and **(ii)** As the "Sun of righteousness", 4: 2.

i) As the **"Messenger of the covenant"**, He has already come, heralded by John the Baptist, but this only partially fulfilled the prophecy. As the "Messenger of the covenant", He will make all the covenant blessings good to Israel. His **deity** is emphasised: He is "the Lord (*Adonai*) Whom ye seek." We should also notice that He is the true priest. As "a priest upon His throne (Zechariah 6: 13)", He will fully answer to the description given in Malachi 2: 6-7. The law of truth will be in His mouth; His lips will keep knowledge; men shall seek the law at His mouth; and He will be the true "Messenger of the Lord of hosts." Isaiah's prophecy will then be fulfilled: "He will teach us of His ways", 2: 3. The earth will then be "full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea", 11: 9.

ii) As the **"Sun of Righteousness"**, He will turn Israel's dark night into day, and do the same for the whole world..

Note some connections between the last book of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament. In Malachi we have the expression, "saith the **Lord**", twenty-six times. But it does not occur at all in Matthew. But we do have fifty-six times, "**I** say unto you." In Malachi, God expressed His **disgust** with the offerings of His people. In Matthew He expressed His **delight** in His beloved Son. We should also note some connections with Luke. The Gospel commences with a priestly man (Zacharias) "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the law blameless. He was not a priest that despised God's name (Malachi.1: 6). We meet Zacharias in the temple, where his "lot was to burn incense." Compare Malachi 1: 11. Luke introduces us to a godly remnant, including Simeon and Anna who spoke "of him." Compare Malachi 3: 16. Luke 1: 17 quotes Malachi 4: 5-6 with reference to John the Baptist.

3) THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

The prophecy of Malachi comprises three major themes: **(A)** The complacency of the nation; **(B)** The coming of the refiner; **(C)** The conduct of the remnant.

A) The Complacency of the Nation

God made eight charges against His people, and each of them was questioned with incredulity and resentment. They just didn't believe a word of it! Such accusations were quite unjust! God therefore substantiated each charge. The questions "Wherein?" and "Wherefore?" represent the full development of Genesis 3: 1, "Hath God said?"

i) They doubted his love. "I have loved you, saith the Lord. **Yet ye say**, Wherein hast Thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.", 1: 2-3. Malachi commences by emphasising God's covenant love for His people. See Deuteronomy 7: 7-8 and Hosea 11: 1-12. The book concludes with a call to fulfil the **obligations of the covenant** as expressed in the law. See 4: 4.

Backsliding in the last book of the Old Testament begins with Israel's failure to appreciate God's love. Backsliding in the last book of the New Testament begins in the same sphere: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love", Revelation. 2: 4. This was so grave that the Lord Jesus continues, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent", V5. Spiritual decline is inevitable if we fail to appreciate God's love. In confirming His love for Israel, God cites His choice of Jacob. It has been said that it was no wonder that God hated Esau, but a thing most wonderful that He loved Jacob! Romans 9: 11 comments: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that

the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth." To some, the subjects of election and predestination are anything but expressions of God's love. It is, however, quite permissible to alter the punctuation of Ephesians 1: 4-5, so that it reads: "He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. ***In love having predestinated us*** unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself."

Do **we** ask, "wherein hast Thou loved us?" Satan will achieve a major victory if he can diminish our appreciation of the love of God. It was to a persecuted church that Paul wrote, "And the Lord direct your hearts into ***the love of God***, and into the patient waiting for Christ", 2 Thess. 3: 5. Paul prayed that the Ephesians "may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know ***the love of Christ***, which passeth knowledge", 3: 18-19. Jude urges us, "Keep yourselves in ***the love of God***", V21.

ii) They despised His Name. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My Name. ***And ye say***, Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" 1: 6. They despised His name by their attitude, rather than in so many words. Failure to appreciate God's love was followed by failure to recognise His claims upon them. God was neither honoured nor feared. There was no acknowledgement that as ***Father***, He was the Source of all that they possessed and enjoyed. There was no recognition that as ***Master***, they were to serve Him "acceptably with reverence and godly fear", Hebrews 12: 28. Both can only flourish when we appreciate His love. To honour and fear God involves unswerving obedience to His word, and holy zeal for His Name. No doubt Israel maintained a superficial reverence, but it was "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." We must learn from this. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word", Isaiah 66: 2. This is the honour and fear that His Name should engender.

iii) They debased His ordinances. "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar: ***and ye say***, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible" 1: 7. See also 1: 12. The balance of the chapter shows only too clearly that the instructions for the sacrifices given in the book of Leviticus had been deliberately flouted. "Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut", Leviticus 22: 24 etc. But this was ignored: "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil?.....Ye brought that which is torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering", V8 & 13. This was downright sinful: "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing", V14. It was a case of 'anything will do for God.' Failure to appreciate God's love, and failure to recognise His absolute authority in our lives, will lead to failure in our priesthood. Chapter 1: 6 to 2: 9 are

addressed to the priests. In the New Testament, the priesthood of all believers involves offering "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," 1 Peter 2: 5. See also Hebrews 13: 15. God forbid that we too should slip into a 'couldn't care less' attitude.

What kind of offering do we bring to God? How, for example, do we offer at the Lord's supper? Will anything do? Has the meeting become for us a mere routine, so that our attitude is summed up in V13, "Behold, what a weariness is it?" The godly Israelite must have expended considerable time and energy in ensuring that his offering would be acceptable. It would be a sacrifice in more ways than one. If there is no expenditure of time and energy in daily reading and study of Scripture, worship and communion with God, and in meditation upon the Person of Christ, it will be an impoverished offering that we bring on Sunday morning. The RSV rendering of V10 is most telling: 'Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire upon My altar in vain.' Need we say more?

iv) They disobeyed His word. "And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that He regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. **Yet ye say**, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously", 2: 13-14. There can be no doubt that this refers to the intermarriage of Israel with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. See Nehemiah 13: 23. God had forbidden such marriages. See Deuteronomy 7: 3-4. The purpose of God was "a godly seed", but Israel "hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which He loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god." James warns against illicit liaisons with the world: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity against God?", 4: 4. See also 1 John 2: 15. Fellowship and alignment with the world is a betrayal of our relationship with God through Christ. Compromise with the world is disobedience.

v) They distorted His character. "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. **Yet ye say**, Wherein have we wearied Him?" When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgement?", 2: 17. The religious world certainly discounts all thought of divine intervention in judgement. God accommodates everybody. But this is not the God of the Bible. Neither for sinners, nor for saints. Our salvation does not give us licence to do as we please, and then to expect God to take pleasure in us. As we sow, we reap. See Galatians 6: 7. The assembly at Corinth found that God **did** intervene in the affairs of His people: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged", 1 Corinthians 11: 30-31. Salvation is not a free pass to freedom from any form of chastening and censure, whatever our conduct. It is deliverance from the bondage of sin to serve God. He cannot compromise with evil in His people.

vi) They declined His offer. "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.....**and ye said** (JND 'but ye say') wherein shall we return?" 3: 7. The answer follows:

vii) They denied His rights. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. **But ye say**, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings", 3: 8. When Israel brought their "tithes and offerings", there was far more at stake than support for the priests and Levites. They did not offer to them: they offered **to God**. God's rights in our lives are more far-reaching than our substance. He has rights over **us**. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and that ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price", 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20. "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again", 2 Cor. 5: 15. The believers in Macedonia recognised this: "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God", 2 Corinthians 8: 5.

As a result of Israel's selfishness, the Levites were forced to work in the fields, instead of discharging their divinely-appointed tasks in the temple. God's work will suffer if we fail to recognise His claims upon us, and we will suffer barrenness too. Malachi refers to "the devourer" in 3: 11. Blessing for Israel lay in practical recognition of God's rights over them: "Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it", V10. Compare Haggai 1: 13 & 2: 19. Similarly for ourselves: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully", 2 Corinthians 9: 6. Under law, the Israelite was obliged to give a tenth: under grace, "every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver", 9: 7.

viii) They disparaged His service. "Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord. **Yet ye say**, What have we spoken so much against Thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" 3: 13-14. How different from the perfect Servant! "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart", Psalm 40: 8. But what about our service? So little sometimes seems to be happening, and we wonder if our efforts are at all worthwhile. Nobody seems to acknowledge our work. People are so unresponsive, the saints so difficult, and we say to ourselves, 'What's the use?' Or it may be that we nurture a desire for a more glamorous field of service, and have come to despise that little job the Master has entrusted to us. We must remember that "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him", 1 Corinthians 12: 18. To treat the Lord's work as being 'more trouble than it's worth', is to be "stout against" Him.

To sum up: **(i) There was no sense of decline.** Just like Samson who "Wist not that the Lord had departed from him." Just like Ephraim: "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not", Hosea 7: 9. The people seemd totally insensible to their true state before God. **(ii) There was no sense of obligation to God.** Their whole attitude was, 'Why should we?'

B) The Coming of the Refiner

"And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness", 3: 3. Whilst these verses anticipate the ultimate cleansing of the nation, we must not forget that **our** conduct and service will be assessed at the judgement seat of Christ. 1 Corinthians 3 uses language reminiscent of Malachi 3: "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is", V13. Have we doubted his love, despised His Name, debased His ordinances, disobeyed His word, distorted His character, declined His offer, denied His rights, or disparaged His service? "The day shall declare it." The "day" in question was gladly anticipated by Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." A "crown of righteousness" would be bestowed upon Him by the Lord "at that day." We must live in view of the coming of the Refiner, that is, in view of the judgement seat of Christ, where our service will be reviewed, and rewarded accordingly.

But there was a group of people who were quite different to their fellow Jews. Malachi therefore draws our attention to;

C) The Conduct of the Remnant

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name", 3: 16. Three features call for present comment:

i) They "feared the Lord." God had said of the nation at large, "If I then be a master, where is My fear?" Here were some who carefully avoided all that would grieve their God. The "fear of the Lord" is reverential awe which engenders hatred of everything that causes Him displeasure. "The fear of the Lord is clean."

ii) They "spake often one to another." Here is fellowship. Their frequent conversation was far removed from the protests of the nation at God's censure of their conduct. The topic of their conversation and fellowship can be judged from their thoughts:

iii) They "thought upon his Name." Their very thinking was God-centred, and

therefore their speech and life in general followed suit. There was nothing restrictive about this. Just think about the names of Jehovah in the Old Testament! They followed the advice to Joshua: "this book of the law shall not depart out of **thy mouth** ("spake often"): but thou **shalt meditate** ("thought upon His Name") therein day and night, that thou mayest observe **to do** ("feared the Lord") according to all that is written therein", Joshua 1: 8. The godly remnant were assured of a bright future:

"They shall be Mine saith the Lord in that day when I make up My jewels."

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