

Old Testament Survey—Malachi

We've come to the end of our journey! God has allowed us to walk through His Word and what we call "the Old Testament" one book at a time. We began in January with the book of Genesis, and it's fitting that as we prepare to celebrate Christmas we arrive at the final book, the book penned by the prophet Malachi.

Discuss: What stands out about the book of Malachi?

Who wrote the book?

--Malachi (1:1)

--There is a question concerning whether "Malachi" is an actual name or a title (since the Hebrew means "my messenger"). LHB feels it is a title, while Archer and Wood believe it is a personal name. The NIV Study Bible note says, "The matter...remains uncertain, and it is still very likely that Malachi was in fact the author's name."

When was the book written?

--450 B.C. (LHB; Wood)

--After 433 B.C. (NIV Study Bible; see timeline)

--It's the last of the Book of the Twelve, and the end of prophetic activity in the Old Testament

Timeline:

516 B.C. Returned exiles finish rebuilding the temple

Key figures: Haggai and Zechariah--prophets; Zerubbabel--governor

458 Ezra the priest comes with several thousand more Jews; King Artaxerxes of Persia encourages Ezra to develop the temple worship

445 Artaxerxes permits his cupbearer, Nehemiah, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls; Nehemiah is appointed governor, and spearheads social and spiritual reforms

443 Nehemiah returns to the service of the Persian king; During his absence, the Jews fell into sin again. Nehemiah returned to Judah to discover the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath broken, and the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt.

Note: The similarity between the sins that both Nehemiah and Malachi denounced suggest that the

two men were contemporaries. It's possible that Malachi was written after Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433.

Why was the book written?

Malachi addressed an apathy in religion that characterized the people of God in the latter half of the 5th century B.C.

Setting: The exile was over, a remnant was back in the Promised Land, and the temple had been rebuilt, just like the Lord predicted. The Jews were thrilled in the year 450 B.C., weren't they? No. Why not?

The return from exile had not brought anything like the messianic age that the earlier prophets had talked about. They had only a portion of the Promised Land. God had not yet come to His temple with power. The people had lost heart (see LHB).

--Some wept (2:13).

--Others became skeptical (1:2; 2:17; 3:14f.).

--Organized religion was held in contempt (1:14; 3:7-12).

--Adultery, perjury, oppression, and discrimination were common (3:5).

--Anything was good enough for the Lord (1:9f.).

What is the outline of the book?

(adapted from Wood, p. 377)

I. God's Love for Israel (1:1-5)

II. Rebuke of the Priests (1:6-2:9)

1. They dishonor God in their sacrifices (1:6-14).

2. They do not faithfully teach the law (2:1-9).

III. Rebuke of the People (2:10-4:3)

1. He exhorts them to faithful giving (3:6-12).

2. He exhorts them to faithful serving (3:13-18).

IV. Admonition to keep the Law and wait for Christ's coming (4:4-6)

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Malachi shows us what God thinks of people who merely go through religious motions.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. *Malachi helps us understand the true nature of God's love.*

Q: What statement did the Lord make in 1:2? "I have loved you."

Q: How did the Jews of Malachi's day respond to that? 1:2b "How...?"

In other words, "God if you love us, you sure have chosen a strange way to show it."

Observation: Walter Kaiser (11), "When times are hard, it is difficult to believe that God loves us. All appearances seem to count against such a belief."

Jerry Bridges (136), "It seems the more we come to believe in and accept the sovereignty of God over every event of our lives, the more we are tempted to question His love. We think, 'If God is in control of this adversity and can do something about it, why doesn't He?'"

The Jews struggled with God's love. So do we at times. When trials hit, we tend to become sarcastic towards life and towards God.

Q: How did Malachi respond to this cheap view of God's love? He told his people to stop feeling sorry for themselves and do two things...

1. Look around and see the evidence of God's love (1:2-5). Things were tough for Israel, but how were they for Edom? What had happened to Edom? Between 550-400, God allowed Edom to be destroyed by the Nabataean Arabs, never to rise again.

Discuss: How would looking at Edom reassure the Jews of God's love? The only reason Israel still existed was God's love. Other nations come and go, but Israel remains, a testimony to the faithful, love of God.

2. Remember, you're in the shape you're in because of sin (Malachi confronts sin throughout the book). You brought this upon yourselves. If God didn't love you, He wouldn't chasten you.

Discuss: How is God's discipline an evidence of His love? Heb 12

2. *Malachi confronts mere formalism in religion.*

The Jews of Malachi's day had become "practical atheists." What's that? A person who gives lip-service to God. He still goes to the temple. He even sacrifices lambs to God. He "believes" in God, yet it's a formal belief, a going-through-the-motions belief. The God in which they believes was not *real* in their

lives.

Discuss: How can we tell if God is real in our lives? When we stop serving Him with gladness, and start giving Him *leftovers*.

Q: What's God's attitude towards our leftovers? 1:10 Shut the doors!

Q: What's God's ultimatum for those who give leftovers? 1:14 Be authentic or be cursed.

Discuss: How can we tell if we're giving God leftovers?