

Foreword

Something that increases our understanding of God's word is to be highly valued. Hence *Studies in Malachi* is to be highly valued.

Thanks to Pastor Haak for bringing to our attention a book of the Bible that is not often studied. However, this last book of the Old Testament is very much worth our study, for he shows that it was written in a time that corresponds to the present day. The chief exhortation of the prophecy of Malachi is most appropriate for our day, namely, that the worship of the Lord be sincere. Always present is the danger that the worship of God becomes a habit. This danger lies especially with ministers and teachers (the priests of today), and they received Malachi's special attention.

Pastor Haak tells us that Malachi's cure for improper worship was an eager anticipation for the fulfillment of God's promise to send his Son. As God used John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus Christ by the preaching of repentance, may God use our study of Malachi to prepare us for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes as judge as well as savior.

It is to be appreciated that this study booklet is written by one who has not only the title of a pastor, but also the heart of a pastor. It is evident that the author's love for the sheep is an extension of his love for the Chief Shepherd.

Thanks to Rev. Haak for making his work of preaching a series of sermons on the prophecy of Malachi to benefit not only those who heard the sermons, but also now all who use this study guide.

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Overview of Malachi

Introduction

The book of Malachi is the last Old Testament prophecy written before the birth of Jesus Christ. Approximately four hundred years of silence would follow the words of this prophecy, until the time Gabriel would be sent to godly Zacharias and Elisabeth to announce the birth of the forerunner of our Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5; 6; Luke 1:1–20).

The importance of this book of the Bible cannot be overstated. The times in which Malachi prophesied correspond exactly to our own; the sins current among God's people and the temptations to which they were exposed correspond to our day as well. Therefore the "burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi" (Mal. 1:1) comes to us with the same urgency as it did to them. Let us pay good heed to the sobering words of this book.

Malachi brings us to the post-captivity period, the time after the remnant of Judah had returned from exile in Babylon. The people had been back in Canaan about one hundred years when God sent Malachi to them. The exact date of Malachi's prophecy cannot be determined. Best estimates place it between Nehemiah's two visits to Jerusalem.

Of the man Malachi we know very little, and nothing is revealed about him in the book itself, other than that his name fittingly means "my messenger." He appears on the scene much the way Elijah did (1 Kings 17:1) and with a very similar message and ministry.

We know more about the times in which Malachi prophesied and the evils that were present. The people had completed the temple, but its worship and priesthood had become

corrupt (Mal. 1:6–2:8). A new generation had risen that was characterized by cold formalism and spiritual indifference. They no longer had much hope for the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1–6). There was an unwillingness to part with money and possessions for the kingdom of God (v. 8). Marriages were based on lust and not on the love of God. Ungodly divorce was openly practiced (Mal. 2:10–17). All of it was really nothing less than spiritual insensitivity to the love of God (Mal. 1:2–14).

How applicable to us today! How much of the church of Jesus Christ, regardless now of the denomination, is tempted with the same sickly indifference and spiritual laxity, with the attitude that it does not make any difference if we serve God or not! The burden of Malachi is the burden to us, namely, that we turn to the Lord God in love and true worship and eagerly await the promise of his Son!

In addition to the relevance of Malachi to our day, we will be blessed in the study of this book because Malachi emphasizes the covenant of God and its implications for our lives and calls us to look for the coming of the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2).

To place Malachi’s prophecy clearly in our minds, we should remember the following main events of the post-captivity period:

606–586 BC Judah is taken captive and Jerusalem is destroyed (2 Kings 25).

606–536 BC The seventy years of captivity (Jer. 29:10).

536 BC Zerubbabel leads fifty thousand Jews back to Judah (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1; Isa. 45:1–4).

535 BC The rebuilding of the temple is begun, but soon halted (Ezra 4:23–24).

520 BC Darius orders the temple to be completed. Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people (Hag. 1:1–15; 2:19; Ezra 6:14–15).

516 BC The temple is completed.

- 478 BC Esther becomes queen of Persia.
- 457 BC Ezra's journey to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7–9).
- 444 BC Nehemiah is sent to Jerusalem. The walls are rebuilt (Neh. 1–2).

The time of Malachi.

- 432 BC Nehemiah returns the second time to Judah (Neh. 13:7).

Study Questions and Activities

1. Begin by reading through the book in one sitting. Write down your first impressions.
2. Read through the prophecy again, this time taking notes on any references to the following:
 - a. The *time* Malachi wrote (setting and historical background)
 - b. The *people* to whom he wrote
 - c. The *basic message* he brought to them

3. Make lists of the evils present in God's people and what God's word says to them about these evils.

Evils

God's word

4. List the prophecies of the birth or coming of Jesus Christ given in this book.

5. Prepare an outline of Malachi, giving the major divisions and what you feel is the unifying theme.

6. Using a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia, do some research on the historical setting of this book.

- a. How many returns from Babylon were there?

- b. Who led them?

- c. What was the purpose for each return?

- d. What was life like for the Jews at that time?
- e. Who were the Samaritans? Find references to the Samaritans in the Bible.
7. Why should we study the book of Malachi?
8. What should be the goals of a study of the book of Malachi?

“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. 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.”—Malachi 1:1–2

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 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.” Revelation 2:4–5

Recommended Resources

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