

Malachi

Introduction

Malachi



Why read this book?

Malachi holds a mirror before us, helping us assess our relationship with the living God. Do we believe he loves us? Does he have our wholehearted love and obedience? Or are we only going through the motions? God's questions to Israel sneak behind our defenses, and shake us out of mere routine, igniting new affection for him.

Who wrote this book?

The name Malachi means *my message*. It is uncertain whether this was actually the author's name, or whether it was used as a title, since prophets in general were called messengers of the Lord. Either way, this prophet clearly sensed God was speaking through him.

When was it written?

Sometime after 460 B.C., after Israel returned from captivity in Babylon, after the temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt (516 B.C.) and after worship there had lapsed into mere routine.

Why was it written?

To confront the spirit of complacency and indifference that so easily overcomes the people of God.

What to look for in Malachi:

Malachi presents a word from God, followed by a complaint from the people, followed in turn by an answer from God. Look for God's passion in this exchange. God loves us with a passionate love and wants us to return that love by faithfulness in human relationships, integrity, purity, and justice for the powerless of society.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*

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Giving God nothing less than our best

Not for another 400 years. After the prophet Malachi speaks, there is no word from God. For 400 years. The silence would be deafening. The next time Israel would hear from God? "Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," John the Baptist proclaims (John 1:29).

This is the final book in the Old Testament, and it is also the last study in this series on the Minor Prophets. One of the interesting themes that we find woven into the book is a series of statements made by God, and each one is responded to by a question that begins "How . . . ?" These express a challenge to God's statements, almost demanding that he give an account of himself and his activity.

Scripture: Malachi

Based On: "The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

The meaning of the name “Malachi” is “My Messenger.” Although the Jews had returned from exile and had rebuilt the temple, there were still several serious discouragements: their land was still a small province; the glorious future that the prophets had foreseen had still not been realized; God had not yet come to dwell in glory in the midst of the temple.

The result of this was that the people began to lose hope, and their worship degenerated into an empty, meaningless ritual. Malachi has a word for every generation that needs to be challenged to turn religious ritual into spiritual reality.

[Q] In what ways does Malachi describe the church today?

[Q] How do we prevent the secularization of the church?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: We rob God when we give him less than our best.

The audacity! Who would cheat God? Who would rob him? Can you imagine? It happens when we slip into religious ritual. Outside, things look on the up-and-up, but inside, our focus has switched to building our own kingdoms and lining our own nests.

[Q] When we rob God, how do we rob ourselves in the process?

The following verses in Malachi outline God's statements or affirmations, followed by the challenges. Read each one of them in its context. Write down the question and then summarize God's response:

- 1:2

- 1:6

- 1:7

- 2:17



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- 3:7

- 3:8

- 3:13

[Q] What do these verses mean for our own walk with God?

Teaching Point Two: The New Testament reinforces the same message as Malachi.

Each of the four Gospel writers in some way quotes Malachi 3:1. But much of what Malachi is talking about is reflected throughout the New Testament.

[Q] How does the message of Malachi relate to 2 Timothy 3:1–5, with emphasis on verse 5?

[Q] What does Malachi 2:15–16 teach us about God's attitude toward divorce? How does this relate to what Jesus says in Mark 10:1–12?

[Q] What will be exposed in us when the Lord himself comes (3:1–5)?

[Q] Malachi 3:8–12 is often used in the context of giving and tithing. How does Malachi say we rob God? What does he want people to do in regard to giving?

[Q] What do you think this passage means for the Christian today with regard to stewardship and giving?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To consider giving our best to God.*

Activity: *Hand out slips of paper. Have each person write down ways they may be robbing God—this may be in finances, but it could also be in other offerings of service and sacrifice. If your group is mature, have members share their thoughts. If not, keep them anonymous, but read them out loud to the group. Read Malachi 3:8–12. Pray prayers of repentance.*

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Part 3 Apply Your Findings

This series on the Minor Prophets has probably directed you into sections of God's Word that you may not have looked at for many years—or perhaps you are reading some parts of Scripture for the first time. That's great! We need to remember that we are called to read the whole counsel of God, not just the parts we like and are familiar with.

Action Point: As we come to the end of this series, think back through the books you have read and studied. Share with the group:

- [Q] What aspect of God did you become newly aware of in this study?
- [Q] What new truth has the Spirit of God taught you?
- [Q] What actions may change in your life as a result of this study?

—Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White

