

Themes in Malachi - Lesson 6

JESUS CHRIST, THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT

Introduction

- A. Text: **Mal. 3:1-3**.
- B. Malachi, like many other prophets, stressed the *covenant* of God with His people.
- C. Had it not been for *the faithfulness of God* to His covenants with Abraham (**Gen. 15:18; 17:2**; etc.) and the nation of Israel (**Exo. 19:5,6; 34:27**; etc.), they would have passed away long before Malachi's day: "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (**Mal. 3:6**).
- D. Despite the Lord's steadfast love, however, *Israel had not kept the covenant*: "From the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them" (**Mal. 3:7**).
- E. Malachi denounced the sins of the people for what they were: *covenant violations*.
 - 1. The priestly corruptions were transgressions of the "*covenant of Levi*" (**Mal. 2:8**; cf. **2:4,5**).
 - 2. Concerning the marriage of men in Israel to Gentiles, Malachi said, "Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the *covenant* of the fathers?" (**Mal. 2:10**).

I. ISRAEL'S IRREVERENCE TOWARD GOD

- A. Conditions in Jerusalem after the exile did not appear to be consistent with God's promise of blessing, and the people could think of nothing to attribute this to but God's indifference. Cf. **Jdg. 6:13**.
- B. Yet many blessings of the covenant were dependent on the people's obedience (**Deut. 28**), so Malachi saw the problem clearly: *the God of the covenant was being dishonored in the hearts of Israel*.
 - 1. The Lord of hosts was being cheated (**Mal. 1:14**), robbed (**Mal. 3:8**), sneered at (**Mal. 1:13**), insulted and treated with contempt (**Mal. 1:7,12**).
 - 2. Harsh words were being spoken against Him (**Mal. 3:13**).
 - 3. His name was being profaned (**Mal. 1:12**).
 - 4. His justice was being called into question (**Mal. 2:17**).
 - 5. His patience was being worn thin by their words (**Mal. 2:17**).
 - 6. The people denied that God loved them (**Mal. 1:2**).
 - 7. They doubted there was any advantage in serving God, complaining that God blessed the wicked more than the righteous (**Mal. 3:14,15**).
- C. From our vantage point, it is nearly incredible that these backsliders were still expecting God's blessing!
- D. Yet Israel was unaware that she had a problem. When God said they were despising His name, they said, "In what way have we despised Your name?" (**Mal. 1:6**).

II. ISRAEL'S MAINTENANCE OF AN OUTWARD FORM OF WORSHIP

- A. To read the horrible ways in which God said they had shown disrespect to Him, we would think they were *blatant sinners who had completely departed from the Lord*.
- B. We need to remember, however, that these covenant-breakers were not in *open* rebellion against God.
- C. They had, to use Paul's words, had "a form of godliness" (**2 Tim. 3:5**).

1. At least in a minimal way, they were continuing to go through many of the right motions.
 2. Their sins were religiously "respectable."
 3. God sees the heart, however, and from His perspective, these people were worse than blatant sinners. Cf. **Lk. 18:9-14**.
- D. It's easy to be critical, but in us today, may God not sometimes see the same shallowness of faith, the same selfishness, the same compromise, the same weariness with worship — in short, the *same basic lack of reverence* — that plagued Israel?
- E. If so, we need to hear Malachi's warning. Cf. **Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11**.

III. LOOKING FORWARD TO THE COMING OF THE CHRIST

- A. There were those in Malachi's day who had such a gross underestimate of their own sins that *they looked forward to the day when God would pour out His vengeance on "the wicked."*
- B. Malachi left no doubt that a day of reckoning was coming for the ungodly: "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up" (**Mal. 4:1**).
- C. But if Israel welcomed this punitive aspect of the Messiah's coming, *they might be surprised to find themselves among those burned up* - **Mal. 3:1-3**.
- D. For those who had trifled with God, the coming of the Messiah would *not be a joyful event*.

IV. THOSE TO WHOM THE MESSIAH WOULD BRING JOY

- A. But Malachi also spoke of a righteous remnant who *did* fear God.
- B. For these people, the Messiah *would* bring joy.
- C. To those who knew what true reverence meant, the coming of the Messiah would be as *the morning rise of the life-giving sun with healing in its rays* - **Mal. 3:16-4:2**.

V. ONE WHO WOULD PREPARE THE WAY

- A. Before the Messiah came, however, another figure was to arrive: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me" (**Mal. 3:1**). Cf. **Isa. 40:3**.
- B. God said, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (**Mal. 4:5,6**).
1. No OT prophecy is interpreted any more clearly in the NT than this one.
 2. It is a prediction of John the Baptist, who proclaimed the repentance from sin without which Christ and His kingdom could not be received - **Mt. 11:7-14**. Cf. **Mt. 17:10-13; Mk. 1:1-4; Lk. 1:17,76; Jn. 1:23; 3:28**.

VI. GOD'S LAST WORD TO ISRAEL BEFORE THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

- A. At the end of Malachi, we come to "the end of the end" of the OT.
- B. The sad story of Israel's role in the scheme of redemption was complete.

1. God had brought Israel into nationhood and entered into His covenant with her.
 2. He had sustained her, blessed her, preached to her, punished her, restored her.
 3. Yet after all this, Israel persisted in irreverent sin.
- C. *Through Malachi, God issued one last call for repentance — announcing the coming of one who would prepare the way for the Messiah and proclaiming the advent of the Messiah Himself.*
- D. There was nothing more that God could do or say to Israel until “the fullness of the time had come” (**Gal. 4:4,5**) 400 years later.

Conclusion

- A. Malachi’s prophecy ends with this threat: “Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (**Mal. 4:6**).
1. In the NT, the Gospel of John says, “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (**Jn. 1:17**).
 2. Placing the law of the Old Covenant over against the grace of the New Covenant, many commentators point out that Malachi, the last book in the OT, ends with the word *curse*, while Revelation, the last book in the NT, ends on a note of *blessing* - **Rev. 22:21**.
 3. It is surely not a coincidence that these two parts of the Bible end as they do.
- B. We need to be careful, however. The OT is not devoid of God’s grace and blessing — *and the NT is certainly not without its warnings of God’s curse.*
- C. We dare not underestimate the relevance of Malachi’s curse to ourselves. Cf. **Hb. 2:1-4; 10:29**.
1. In this age of grace, it is just as necessary for us to fear God and obey Him - **Tit. 2:11,12**.
 2. If we aren’t faithful to God, Malachi’s curse will fall on us as surely it did on them.
 3. *If we don’t fear God and serve Him accordingly, the “Second Coming” of Christ will hold for us the same terrible prospect that His “First Coming” held for Malachi’s people.*
- D. God requires that we *honor* and *respect* Him — not only in word but also in deed.
1. He seeks from us a worship that is truly worship: one that *heeds His instructions carefully* and one that *springs from hearts of love and faith*.
 2. He requires that we *take Him seriously* and *not trifle with His greatness*.
 3. He requires, in short, that we *fear His name*.
- E. As in Malachi’s day, so in ours, God’s words roll thunderously down from heaven: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?” (**Mal. 1:6**).