



**Adelaide College**

*Fear the Lord and be wise*

## *Restoration After the Exile*

### *The Foundations for Building a Spiritual People*

#### **Lecture 10: Malachi and the Close of the Old Testament Canon**

The Book of Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets and the last of the Old Testament books, and so with this book the Old Testament canon (collection of accepted Old Testament books) is brought to a close. The name “Malachi”, means “My messenger”.

*There are very few historical details in the Book of Malachi, but because of its contents it is clear that it belongs to the same period of history as Haggai and Zechariah; also in 1:8 the word translated “governor” is a Persian word pechah.*

We have seen in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah that both the people and the priests were spiritually lax. Malachi also shows how the priests failed to perform their duties properly by allowing improper sacrifices, especially lame and blind animals. He also mentions how the people sinned in various ways. God announces through the prophet that judgment will come, and ‘Elijah’ will precede the coming of the Lord.

*The historical Elijah was a 9th Century prophet that we read about in 1 & 2 Kings but the ‘Elijah’ in Malachi was to be John the Baptist in the New Testament (Mt. 11:11-14). This provides a link between the last book of the Old Testament and the New Testament.*

#### Seven Questions

In Malachi the people ask seven questions. Looking at these questions is one way of approaching the book.

1. How have you loved us? (1:2-5).

The people ask God this deplorable question, as if they do not know how God has loved them. God answers by saying that He chose Jacob, a forefather of the Jews, in preference to Esau, who became the father of the Edomites. The Jews became God’s chosen people. God affirms His love for Israel but this first question shows the people’s scepticism and doubt that God ever really loved them at all.

2. How have we shown contempt for your name? (1:6-2:9)

The people ask how they have despised God’s name. The answer is that they didn’t offer

God the same respect they offered their human fathers and masters. They disrespected God by violating His covenant (1:6-14). They sacrificed lambs with blemishes, which was forbidden in the law. God was meant to get the best of the crops and flock, but they were giving second-rate sacrifices, and so He refuses to accept the people and their offerings. In 2:1-9 the priests come in for particular condemnation. They were carrying out their ministry for their own gain and were causing others to stumble by not teaching them correctly.

### 3. Why (How) do we profane the covenant? (2:10-16)

In 2:13 Malachi points out that God no longer accepts the offerings of the people, and in 2:14 they want to know why. The answer is in 20:10-12 where we see that God refuses their offerings because they were marrying foreign women. God was their father. The nation had a special relationship with Him, but their separation from the world was being corrupted. In verse 12 Malachi requests that those guilty of intermarriage be “cut off”.

*It was a direct violation of the covenant to marry foreigners, one reason being that this would introduce the worship of foreign gods into Israel. If everyone intermarried, there would be no distinct ethnic race left through whom God could bring the knowledge of salvation. This had been the particular sin of king Solomon over 500 years before (1 Kings 11:1-13).*

Another problem was divorce (2:13-16). The people covered the altar with tears and looked sincere, but God would not accept their sacrifices because they were not sincere at all. They were getting divorced. Verses 14-16 show that marriage is a covenant witnessed by God and one that should never be broken. In verse 16 God says, “I hate divorce.” This is a strong statement, which we should not try to water down to suit the spirit of any age, whether the days of Malachi or ours.

### 4. How have we wearied him? (2:17-3:6)

The prophet tells the people that they have wearied God with their words, but they ask how they have wearied Him. This question shows that the people mistook God’s merciful patience as a sign that He was not concerned to punish the wicked. They felt that there was a lack of divine justice (2:17). But Malachi promises that God will judge the wicked.

*The prophecy in 3:1 about a messenger being sent to prepare the way for the Lord is a promise that was fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus, as we see in the Gospels.*

Two images are presented in 3:2. The first is the smelter’s fire or the refiner’s fire, which purifies raw metals extracted from the ground. The second is the launderer’s soap. These two images emphasise the cleansing and purifying purpose of the Lord’s coming, especially His second coming the judge the world.

### 5. How are we to return? (3:7)

Israel needs to repent and return to God before He can restore them. But they ask how

they are to return. He implies the answer to this question at the beginning of verse 7 when He says that they had not kept His statutes. Return involves obedience.

## 6. How do we rob you? (3:8-12)

The robbery mentioned in 3:8-9, is to do with the people withholding their tithes and offerings. In this way they were robbing God. The answer to this in 3:10-12, where God says that if they would be generous in their giving, He would open the floodgates of heaven and blessings would flow out. He would provide all their needs and more.

*The natural human thing is for people to spend all their money on themselves and not leave any for God. When we do that our priorities are wrong and we never seem to have enough. Things in themselves never satisfy, but people persist in spending all their money on themselves and even go into debt searching for happiness. If our priorities are right and we are seeking happiness God, then we give to Him faithfully and gratefully, and we find satisfaction in life through a living relationship with Him. He provides our needs and it is enough.*

3:11 mentions the pests that were devouring the crops in the fields. There are times when God allows that to happen to get us to return to Him.

*The issue of giving is found elsewhere in Scripture, e.g. in 2 Cor. Chs. 8-9. Here we see that –*

- *Giving is a sign that God's grace is at work in the giver (8:1).*
- *Giving can be done even when times are difficult (8:2).*
- *Giving is a privilege (8:4).*
- *Giving what belongs to us is really a form of the giving of ourselves (8:5).*
- *Giving is proof of our love (8:8).*
- *God's blessing is proportionate to our giving (9:6, 8).*
- *Giving should be voluntary and from a cheerful heart (9:7).*
- *Giving glorifies God before others as tangible testimony to the effectiveness of the gospel in our hearts (9:12).*

## 7. What have we said against you? (3:13-15)

Malachi condemns the people because their words have been harsh against the Lord. They have said, "It is futile to serve God" (verse 14). This shows they had become stubborn and arrogant. But God has "a scroll of remembrance" (3:16-18). God does not forget those who fear and serve Him. Justice will come on the wicked, but the righteous will be spared.

The book ends by reminding us that "a day" has been set aside by the Lord (4:1-6) for judgment. This Day of the Lord is also spoken of in Zeph. 1:14 and Joel 2:31, where it is described as "great and dreadful". Although divine judgment finds its partial fulfilment in every act of God's judgment in this present age, the primary fulfilment will occur at the second coming of Christ.

## Summary (4:4-6)

The last three verses summarise Malachi's message. Verse 4 exhorts the people to follow the Law of Moses. If they had been doing that all along they would have been tithing, not intermarrying, not getting divorced, etc.

Verses 5-6 give a promise for the future. Verse 5 promises that God will send Elijah the prophet to announce the arrival of the Day of the Lord. Verse 6 says that his ministry will be to restore the hearts of the fathers to the children. This is a reference to the ministry of John the Baptist who came to announce that the Day of the Lord was at hand. He called the people to repentance, but the nation rejected Jesus and as a result Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.

*Notice what the last word of the Old Testament is – “curse.” That is the last word in the Hebrew Bible as well. What a way to end! It leaves us hanging, anticipating, and searching for a resolution. The resolution would come with the Messiah after roughly 400 years of no word from God, the period of time between the death of Malachi and the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus.*

## The Close of the Old Testament Canon

With the Book of Malachi, the Old Testament canon is brought to a close. The whole biblical canon consists of the books of the Old and New Testaments as we have them listed in our Protestant Bible. The word “canon” comes from the Greek word *kanon*. It originally meant a reed or measuring rod but came to mean a rule or standard.

The Old Testament was not put together all at once but rather God constructed or canonised it over a period of 1000 years, between the 15th Century, or the time of Moses, and the 5th Century B.C., i.e. down to the time of Malachi. The Jews recognise the Old Testament books as divinely inspired. The Jewish Bible of today is composed of three divisions: Torah or The Law, Neviim or The Prophets, and Ketuvim or the Writings. The Law is the first five books of Moses. The Prophets are all the books of the prophets. The Writings are all the other Old Testament books, such as the Psalms, Proverbs, etc. This approximates to the words of Jesus in Lk. 24:44, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

The Roman Catholic Church accepts seven extra books: Tobias, Judith, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom and First and Second Maccabees; also certain additions to Esther and Daniel. These books are classed by Protestants as the “Apocrypha”, which means “Hidden”, but they are part of the Septuagint Bible, the Greek version of the Old Testament, and they were widely read in the days of the early Christian Church.



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