

**BOOK OF MALACHI**

1. This is the last book in the English version of the Old Testament. However, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Chronicles is the last book in the Old Testament.
2. Prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Haggai and Zechariah.
  - a) They were all were post-exilic prophets.
  - b) Haggai and Zechariah were used by God to encourage the Jews to complete the building of the Temple in Jerusalem and to encourage more Jews to return to the Jerusalem, respectively.
  - c) Malachi was the last of these post-exilic prophets. His role was to warn them of their behaviour in the completed Temple. These events took place about 100 years after they returned from exile in Persia (Note that Babylon was conquered by the Persians).
3. The situation during these post-exilic times were:
  - a) The Israelites were depressed because they had sacrificed a good and prosperous life in Persia (i.e. where Babylon was) behind to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
  - b) After 100 years, Jerusalem was just a little town on the hill.
    - i. Nehemiah had completed building the walls of Jerusalem with a tiny temple and there were very few people.
    - ii. There were not enough people to defend Jerusalem, so the majority of Jews did not live in the city, fearing an attack as enemies would usually capture the capital first.
    - iii. Therefore, Jerusalem was not a safe place to live in. Most of them lived in the villages nearby as it was easy to hide from enemy attackers.
  - c) This situation was not what they anticipated because God had promised the restoration of a glorious Jerusalem.
  - d) We all have a limited concept of time and we become impatient with God. God works on a different timeframe. Like city folks, we want and expect everything today to be very fast. But people in the villages have a much slower pace of life. To God, a 1000 years is like one day (See 2 Peter 3:8). He is in no hurry as He lives in eternity. We will also be living in eternity with God, so we must learn to view life through His time-frame.
  - e) Therefore, the Jews were very discouraged because they did not understand God's time-frame
4. One key difference between the Jews in pre-exilic and post-exilic periods was that the post-exilic Jews did not worship idols.
  - a) But, their hearts were still as sinful. The post-exilic Jews worshipped God in the same traditional, ritualistic way (similar to modern "Christians" who are born into "Christian" families but are not born-again).
  - b) The post-exilic Jews did their bare minimum so as to not make God angry and be punished by Him, rather than seeking to please Him. They were poor and felt that God did not bless them, as there were other nations richer than Israel. They felt that though they served God, yet they remained poor. Hence, they questioned, "What is the point of continuing to serve God?"

- c) However, this is a human view of economics.
  - i. The reason why the Jews were poor was because they had treated God badly. So, God responded by treating them likewise.
  - ii. Therefore, if you do not bother about God, do not expect God to bother about you and bless you. It does not mean you can do anything you like after being saved. Our constant fellowship with God is dependent on our present obedience to Him.
  - iii. The Jews did not understand God's idea of economics (See Matthew 6:33).
- 5. Malachi was the last prophet and only appeared once in the concordance.
  - a) Malachi is not a Jewish name, unlike Zechariah or other common Jewish names that appeared in the Bible many times.
  - b) In fact, Malachi is not a name but the word, "Malachi" means "Messenger". Some people argued that there was no such prophet and some assumed that Ezra had written this book under the name of "Messenger".
- 6. The book of Malachi was not written in the typical prophetic style of "Thus says the Lord..." It was written more like a dialogue in which Malachi made an accusation (or a statement), the people responded, and then God answered.
- 7. This is the last book of the Old Testament, and the final words from God through His last prophet, Malachi, before He kept silent for 400 years. Why did God decide not to communicate with the Jews for such a long time?
  - a) It was because God was very angry with His people.
    - i. Just like when our earthly father refused to talk to you for a long time, he must be really angry with you.
    - ii. You know your father is still there, and there is no question in the mind of the Jews that God was still there despite His silence for 400 years.
    - iii. It was not a problem of whether there is a God as far as the Jews were concerned in this period of silence. Even today, the Jews still believe that God is there which is the main reason for returning to Israel (in this troubled part of the world.)
  - b) It was clear that God was fed up with His people and hence refused to speak to the Israelites for 400 years.
  - c) In today's context, Christians wonder why God never "speaks" to them. Christians ask for wisdom, but they do not "hear" from God. Have you asked yourself if God is angry with you, that whenever He tried to get your attention, you ignored or questioned Him (just like the Jews during the time of Malachi)?
- 8. There were a total of 6 accusations or statements made in the book of Malachi with corresponding responses from people and God's answers that follow.

First dialogue (Malachi 1:2-5)

- 1. Malachi 1:2-3. God made a statement, "I have loved you, yet you ask Me in what way have I loved you."
- 2. The Jews questioned, "You loved us? But why are we so poor?" They doubted God's love, just like we may question our earthly father, "Are you sure you love me? If so,

why do you keep beating and scolding me?"

3. God's response was:

- a) Though Esau and Jacob were brothers, yet God loved Jacob but not Esau.
  - i. Jacob's descendants were the Israelites, and Esau's descendants were the Edomites.
  - ii. The Edomites were rich and powerful, but they do not exist today because God had destroyed the Edomites in fulfilling Obadiah's prophecy. (Edom is the modern day Petra in Jordan).
  - iii. But, God had said that as long as the world exist, there will always be an Israelite (See Jeremiah 31:36).
  - iv. God's response to the Israelites was, "Have I not blessed you and preserved you even in exile? I still took care of you. Do you not know I love you?"
- b) We often forget what God has done for us. We look at things we do not have and forget the things that God had given to us. We look at our problems and question where God is. We just need to look around us and we will see that God is there.

#### Second dialogue (Malachi 1:6 - 2:9)

1. Malachi 1:6-7. God said to the Israelites, "Where is My honour as Father and Master? You, especially the priests, despise Me!" Just as in war, any failure is attributed to the general, so when there was spiritual failure in His people, God would call out the priests to account for it as they were responsible for the spiritual state of His people.
2. The Jews responded, "How have we despised you? Every day we come to Your Temple".
3. God's accusation was:
  - a) The priests have allowed lame and blind animals to be sacrificed as offerings on the altar. God had told them, when they make a sacrifice, the animal had to be without blemish and perfect. The priests did the minimum and accepted whatever animal that was brought to them as sacrifice, whether they be dying or sick.
  - b) Christians today also give God their spare cash or time, etc. to God and not their best. Whatever they do not need, they gave to God. Would we give such things to a king or governor? The priest and the pastors are responsible because they have allowed such a spiritual state to happen and letting it become a norm.
  - c) Malachi 2:7-8. The priests should guard the Law and instruct the people and not cause them to stumble. Many pastors today are causing people to stumble by preaching falsehood, instead of guarding God's Word.

#### Third dialogue (Malachi 2:10-16)

1. This is an accusation of treachery to God. Verse 11 says that Judah (i.e. the Southern Kingdom of Israel) was faithless and profaned the sanctuary of God by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

- a) The Jewish men were divorcing and abandoning their Jewish wives for pagan or foreign wives whose sexual lifestyles were much more attractive to them. They were not taking care of their wives and children. They made a vow of loyalty to their wives but denied them after that. Denying a vow is dealing treacherously in God's sight.
  - b) This is no different from people who made a vow to worship God but deny Him subsequently.
2. Christians today make their marriage vows before God, and yet they walk out on their spouses there after.
- a) Today, the divorce rate among Christians is similar to that of non-Christians.
  - b) Unlike non-Christians who did not make such a marriage vow, Christian couples did in the presence of God.
  - c) Hence, to God, any Christian who walks out on his or her spouse is committing treachery.

#### Fourth dialogue (Malachi 2:17 - 3:5)

1. This is an accusation by God that He was wearied by their words. Yet they asked God in what ways had they wearied Him. They even asked, "Where is the God of justice?"
2. Christians today, likewise, question why do good people suffer while evil people prosper? They do not read the Bible and the book of Malachi, hence they do not know.
3. God's answer is in Malachi 3:1.
  - a) God said that the day of His coming is sure but it is in His time. Do not make God live in your time-frame. He will definitely judge evil but in His own time.
  - b) Even the courts of our land do not give verdict to a court case immediately, as the judgment takes time to be made.
  - c) Judges on Earth may even be corrupt or impotent, but God will deal in due time and He will deal justly.

#### Fifth dialogue (Malachi 3:6-12)

1. Malachi 3:7. God told His people to return to Him.
2. But the people's response was, "In what way shall we return?"
3. God's response was, "By paying your tithes".
4. When pastors preach on tithing in church, they often use this verse out of context.
  - a) In the Old Testament, the Jews were commanded to tithe 10% (33% if all dues were accounted for) If not, they would be cursed.
  - b) However, in the New Testament, we are not commanded to give tithe, but instead to give our whole life because we have been bought with a price. Therefore, we are called to glorify God with our body and spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 6:20)
    - i. In the New Testament, it is *not* 10%.

- ii. Everything we own belongs to God and whatever we use, we use as stewards to meet our needs, not to satisfy our wants. After you have satisfied your needs, the rest belongs to God.
  - iii. If God gave His Son and His Son gave His life for us, then know that He bought you with high price.
  - iv. We are redeemed and are slaves to the greatest Master of all. He will take care of all our needs and everything He gives us is from Him. Everything we earn is through the things He gave us such as health, opportunities, connections, etc. As stewards, we manage our resources for God because all our resources belong to Him.
  - v. It is not that 10% of what we have that belongs to God or God only owns 10% of our 100%. We should not cheapen the price of redemption.
- c) For the poor, even if they give nothing because they need to meet their needs, God understands.
- i. But for the super-rich, even giving 99% may not be enough. Be a willing giver (See 2Corinthians 9:6-7) because Christ willingly gave His life for us.
  - ii. The Tithe does not apply to us. We should not be tithers but willing givers. We should turn every dollar we have to eternal rewards.
  - iii. Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, “freely you have received, so freely give”.
5. Malachi 3:10.
- a) When God opens the windows of heaven, it means He pours out rain. If God withholds rain, nothing will grow, as mentioned in the books of Haggai and Zechariah.
  - b) It is not referring to material riches from heaven, like what the prosperity gospel preaches.
    - i. This verse is often taken out of context. God does not want us to be “filthy rich” because it is a filthy curse.
    - ii. God only allows some people to be rich but not all, because riches are temptations which not many people can handle well (See Proverbs 30:7-9).
    - iii. Rich people will use their money to love women, wine, etc. instead of loving God. God does not pour out His riches from heaven to make us materially rich.

Sixth dialogue (Malachi 3:13-18)

1. This is the last accusation. God said that words of the Israelites were hard against Him. The people had said that it was useless to serve God and there was no profit from keeping His ordinances since the wicked prosper but they remained poor.
2. In the earlier 4<sup>th</sup> dialogue, they asked, “*What’s the point in serving God?*” and God answered that there will be a day of judgement. Now, they said, “There is *no point in serving God*”. God’s answer then came in a story in verses 16 to 18.
3. In the story, God said that those who love and fear Him would have their names written in the Book of Remembrance and they shall be His in the day when He makes up His

treasured possession. He said there would be a distinction between those who serve God and those who do not. Therefore, the point is that there is a reward for those who fear God and trust Him.

4. So, we should not look for judgement and rewards on this Earth but instead look for judgement and rewards in eternity. We should open our eyes and realise that we do not live in our own time-frame but God's time-frame, which means we should adjust to God and not expect God to adjust to us.

#### Chapter 4

1. This chapter captures the last few words of the Old Testament before a long silence of 400 years from God. Hence they are very important words.
2. Malachi 4:1 warns that the Day of Judgement would be coming.
3. In Malachi 4:2, the "Sun of Righteousness" here refers to Jesus Christ. He will give us His righteousness.
4. In Malachi 4:3, God said, "On the day that *I act*" or "On that day that *I do this*".
  - a) It is not on the day you act, again, it is not our time-frame but His. In agriculture, there could be 6 months of winter when animals are kept in the barn. Then when the Sun comes up in spring and gates of the barns are open, calves run out and jump as they are excited to come out from their dark barns to see the bright Sun and breathe in the fresh air.
  - b) We will also jump with joy when we enter the Kingdom that God has prepared for us. Our reward is not on this Earth. This is not a prosperity gospel. Many Christians go to church with only their present daily cares in their minds, worrying about their health, their jobs, children's exam, etc. There is very little focus in the Christians' mind about the Day of Judgement.
5. This last section seems to be added as the end of the Old Testament, as it is not just the end of the book of Malachi.
  - a) Malachi 4:4. There would be silence from God for 400 years but God reminded the Israelites that they still have the Law of Moses and the Scriptures. Many Christians say that God do not talk to them but yet they do not open the Scriptures. God is waiting to talk to us every day.
  - b) Malachi 4:5 says that Elijah would come. This Elijah refers to John the Baptist in the New Testament.
  - c) Malachi 4:6. "Utter destruction" or "curse" (as in the King James Version) is literally the last word from God in the Old Testament.
    - i. God said, "Lest I come and strike the Earth with a curse." He told the Jews to remember the Law and wait for Elijah to come.
    - ii. Elijah was the first prophet who warned Israel. But another Elijah came in the New Testament. This refers to John the Baptist who came to preach about repentance after 400 years of silence, after the book of Malachi. In Matthew 11:7-14 and Matthew 17:9-13, Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah. God had fulfilled His promise made in Malachi 4:5.

- iii. At the transfiguration, Moses (who brought the Law) and Prophet Elijah (who warned the people) were there, hence the phrase “Law and the Prophets” in Matthew 11:13.
- iv. This last book of the Old Testament says “you will be cursed if you do not heed this warning”. Unfortunately, the Jews ignored John the Baptist when he came and the curse continued for another 2000 years till today. But the romance story of God and Israel (as well as God and Church) will consummate very soon.

We learn from the book of Malachi that God’s judgement is sure but His time-frame is different from ours. Even though we cannot see the hand of God with our eyes, remember Him, respect Him and give Him your best. Do not just offer 10% but 100% of your whole life!