

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



BUT HOW?

MALACHI

This is the last prophet to speak to God's people for more than four hundred years! With all that we have discussed and all of the trouble from which God's people had been led through, you would think perhaps this message would end somewhat on a positive note as far as God's people were concerned; but such is not the case.

This is a message filled with sarcastic and disrespectful overtones. These are the words of a people who have heard it all and simply didn't care. If you read this and think "Disrespectful Teenager" then you have a fairly accurate picture in your mind.

The name Malachi means "My Messenger" and is the Hebrew word for angel. Malachi was God's messenger to God's unresponsive people. Once again, you would think that because this was the last prophet before Christ, the people would be filled with anticipation and excitement because the Messiah had been predicted and everything about Him described, but culturally what we find is that God's with people legalism had taken root under the foundation of the religious commands. Any time this happens, indifference, and unfaithfulness in heart is not far behind. If rules are all that are required for a relationship, then the steps that follow are coldness and corruption.

Needless to say, Malachi was yet another prophet with a hard mission from God because he was tasked with talking to a hard-hearted people who didn't like being reprov'd. When you read this book you'll be met with a series of accusations given to the people by Malachi and the people callously respond with "Wherein?" In other words, they were saying, "But how?" after their sin was brought before them.

However, toward the end of this prophecy, God once again, as He always does, tells His people that there is hope.

How to Think About Malachi

God's Love Is Unquestionable (1:1-5): The first words God says to His people are, "I have loved you..." Would they be able to honestly look back and literally think of nothing that God had done for them? Our answer; absolutely not. But Israel simply sighs and asks, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" In other words, "Oh really? Please explain." And in His answer, God explains how they became a nation in the first place.

God's Love Is Confrontational (1:6-3:15): In this portion of the prophecy, God denounces, once again, the priests and then the people. But this is the nature of love. Real love (God's Love), always confronts error, and this is what we have here.

God's Love Confronts the Priests (1:6-2:9)— There was a tremendous amount of hypocrisy that made its way through the ranks of the priesthood. They claimed a love for God and a concern for holiness, but their

lives displayed quite the opposite. They had begun to take foreign wives once again (which was one of the main reasons they had slid into the pit of idolatry in the first place). Understand this law wasn't created because God is a 'respector of persons', it was a matter of being unequally yoked.

Further, their view of marriage became lower and lower, and as a consequence, divorce was on the rise. Understand also that because we are sinful, divorce happens. However, when the institution of marriage is seen as insignificant and negotiable instead of a covenant to an individual and before God, it becomes nothing more than a mutual agreement. How we treat marriage becomes a reflection of what we think of God.

God's Love Confronts the People (2:10-3:18)— If God's laws don't match what you want to do, well, you change what God likes to match what you're doing, and then you're set. That is what these people did. As we have seen in the past, these people believed themselves to be clean because of their rituals. This is a petty view of God, and God tells the people that He's tired of it.

God's Love Is Final (4): When we look at the whole of everything we know about God's love, there is one characteristic that stands above the rest, and that is that His love is final. We never have to worry about God's love. God will never look at His people and say, "I've fallen out of love with you." No, God's love is final. And how God explains this is with the coming of Messiah and the coming of Elijah.

The Coming of Messiah (4:1-3)— This is Malachi being given a vision of Christ that spans far beyond His first coming. As Malachi looks out, he sees that glorious second coming of Christ, and that when He comes, He will come with "...healing in His wings..."

The Coming of Elijah (4:4-6)— There is speculation on this point however, it would appear that this prophecy was fulfilled by the ministry of John the Baptist. The angel said of his birth that John would "Go before him (The Messiah) in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). But he was rejected. It seems clear that since the Jews, as a whole, refused the announcement of the King, Jesus would send another Elijah-like prophet in the future and many believe this to be one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:1-19.

Whether or not this is the case, what we need to know is that this will be accomplished because of the finality of the love of God. God wants people to know His truth. He is not obligated to reveal His truth, but because of love, He speaks, and in this case, will speak more powerfully than ever before to proclaim His glory before the earth.

What to Look for in Malachi

Attitudes to Avoid— What mainly stands out in this short message are the responses given by God's people. Yes, we see a different culture and yes we see a different time, but sown in the words of this prophecy is the shared human nature we all know too well. So let's see if we can summarize a few of these attitudes in one word, and then be on the lookout so that we can avoid them.

Indifference— This is the word that describes the continued "wherein" response that we see all over this book. There was no sorrow contained in these words. There was no hint of repentance, remorse, sorrow, or even attentiveness. God, in His approach to these people, is only met with indifference.

This is the same attitude that can be characteristic of us at times. We can find ourselves not caring about things that we really should care about. We can find ourselves shrugging at truth that would have been unfathomable had it not been for God's revelation. When this happens, this is a time to grab yourself by the shoulders and shake out of it. Avoid the attitude of indifference.

Assumption— Once again, there was a feeling that if they just did the ritual, they would be fine with God. This is a terrible assumption. We, as a people, are absolutely fantastic at creating a ‘god’ in our own image. Many of the things we do, we do assuming God is just going to go along with our plan. However, it’s not very long before we become bored with God because He’s not really the God of the Bible. Because we impose our assumptions upon God, His requirements become a burden instead of a help because we assume the wrong things about God. Unless your feelings about God can be confirmed by Scripture, stay away from the attitude of assumption.

Defiance— We see this attitude being played out by the famous “robbery” passage. These people were keeping their tithes and offerings to themselves. We see this in the taking on of foreign wives. We see this in their treatment of divorce. We see this in their treatment of each other. There was a spirit of defiance that was running wild among God’s people. Everything God had instructed, they defied. This is a huge attitude to avoid. Humility is the agent that cures defiance.

Attributes to Adore— In contrast to the attitudes we should avoid, we see a few attributes of God that we should absolutely and consistently adore about Him.

Love— God said, “I have loved you...” This is the premier attribute of God— He is love. And it is by His love that we can even understand the concept and action of love. And it is by His example, expression, and explanation of love that we love Him and love like Him in response. This is written all over the pages of the Bible— it is this attribute of God saying loudly and consistently, “I love you.”

Unchangeable— Malachi 3:6 says so plainly, “For I am the LORD, I change not...” What a great truth! It is so incredible that God deals absolutely consistently with mankind and that when it comes to His love and blessing, or any of His attributes, we receive them in full force holding back nothing from our lives. There is never a generation who received less or more of God in any capacity. Adore God now because He never changes! He won’t love you one day and leave you the next. As the Hebrew writer says, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

Faithfulness— This obviously compliments the previous point. Because God is unchangeable, He is faithful. He will do what He says He will do. He will see us through to the other side. Praise Him for His faithfulness. Adore Him for His faithfulness.

What to Gain from Malachi

Always Look to God’s Provision to See God’s Love: Becoming distracted is a second nature reaction for us. And the more distracted we become, the less we see God’s hand of provision, and the less we see God’s provision, the less we experience God’s love.

That’s where these people were. Their sarcastic questions to God said it all— “Wherein.” They stopped looking. God didn’t get them to where they were, they did. God didn’t give them their income, they did. And because they thought they were the masters of their own lives, and provided for themselves, they came to a point in their lives as a people where they were unable to see God’s love for them.

This is a giant lesson for us. Every time we wake, that is God suffering us another day. Our ability to work, the freedom we experience, the richness of relationships, everything comes from God. The Bible says “Every good and perfect gift comes from above...” and by this, and by His provision of salvation, we see God’s stamp of love and affirmation on our lives. Don’t stop looking. Keep your eyes on God and all He has done and will continue to do. What a way to end.



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