

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK
MALACHI
A LOVING GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENCE**

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Many people today resist any thought of commitment.
People don't follow through on the commitments they have made.
They don't keep their promises; they don't fulfill their covenants.

That was the problem in Malachi's day also.
People didn't keep their commitments to God.
Their failure to keep their commitments to God spilled over into every area of their lives.
They didn't keep their promises to other people either.
Even their marriage vows were affected.

God calls on His people to return to Him and to become promise keepers!
When it becomes important for them to keep their commitments to God, they will keep their commitments to one another also.
God will be glorified when they honor His name and demonstrate that they can be trusted to do what they say they will do.

Author

The prophet's background is unknown except for his name and his prophecy.
His name means "my messenger."

Date

Similar problems to those found by Nehemiah on his second visit to Jerusalem in about 425 B.C., give evidence for a similar date.
Malachi probably prophesied a little later, around 430 to 420 B.C.

Background

The historical background is similar to Haggai and Zechariah:
Return to the land
Reconstruction of temple and city

Time has passed since the writing of the other two.

The people have become corrupt since the beginning of the work of rebuilding.
Their morals have deteriorated.
They have stopped the tithe.

Purpose and theme

The message of the prophet urges them to repent on the basis of God's program.
God wants them to get on with the moral and spiritual reconstruction of their lives.

The theme of the book is repentance.

The prophet reminds the people of God's love and encourages them to conduct themselves before the heathen as the chosen ones of God.

He urges them to live in a manner which reflects their position in God's program.

They should abandon their ritualistic, insincere worship, and offer true worship to God, from the heart.

God's love for them requires them to respond in love and obedience.

Organization

Malachi begins with a declaration of God's love. 1:1-5

It accuses the priests and the people of not responding to His love in obedience to His Word 1:6-3:6

The book concludes with an appeal to return to Him 3:7-4:6

Argument

DECLARATION OF DIVINE LOVE 1:1-5

INTRODUCTION 1:1

SUMMARY DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE 1:2a

The book opens with a reminder of God's love for them.

ISRAEL'S BLINDNESS TO GOD'S LOVE 1:2b

The people have become so blind that they are not able to recognize it.

DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE 1:2c-5

Therefore, the prophet gives them two illustrations of that love:

His choice of Israel 1:2c-3a

God chose Jacob, their forefather, over Esau, his brother.

His preservation of Israel 1:3b-5

Not only did He choose them, but He also preserved them throughout their history.

His protection is especially evident in His dealing with Edom, who continually seeks their destruction.

DENUNCIATION OF ABUSE OF GOD'S LOVE 1:6-3:6

Having reminded them of God's love for them, he calls their attention to conditions in the land.

They have not responded appropriately to God's love.

DENUNCIATION OF THE PRIESTS 1:6-2:9

The first criticism is directed against the priests, those who represent God to man and man to God.

Offenses of the priests 1:6-14

Despising God's name 1:6

He accuses them of despising God's Name:

Offering unclean sacrifices 1:7-9

They offer sacrifices to God that they would not dare offer to an earthly governor.

Defiling God's name before the Gentiles 1:10-14

They offer "strange fire" on God's altar.

The Gentiles who see their defilement of God's Name are caused to think lowly of Him.

Warning of judgment 2:1-9

Because of these offenses, they are warned that He will send a curse on them.

God sent the law as a means to purify Israel and to bring glory to Himself.

Because of their disrespect for His law, He has brought their present lowly condition on them.

Warning given 2:1-3

Contrast with Levi 2:4-8

They haven't followed his example and kept the covenant.

Result of their condition 2:9

DENUNCIATION OF THE PEOPLE 2:10-3:6

His second criticism is directed against all the people.

Offenses of the people 2:10-17

Although he mentions various faults, he rebukes them for one main offense: they have disregarded God's plan for marriage and have practiced divorce and remarriage.

They have been unfaithful to their covenants.

Mistreatment of brethren 2:10

Spiritual fornication 2:11-12

Divorce and remarriage 2:13-16

Denial of God's justice 2:17

Warning of judgment 3:1-6 Messiah will come -to judge!

He warns them that because of their evil deeds, He will send His messenger to His temple.

He will bring a judgment that will result in purification.

DESIRE FOR POSITIVE RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE 3:7-4:6

CALL TO REPENTANCE 3:7-12

Having warned them of judgment, He calls them to repentance.

If they fulfill their covenant obligations, they will be spared.

The tithe is presented as one area in which they have failed to fulfill their obligations.

God's concern was over their failure to recognize their debt and dependence on Him.

The tithe was a sign of obedience and ownership.

If they repent of their neglect in this area, it will be interpreted as their declaration of intent to meet their covenant obligations.

DEFENSE OF GOD'S JUSTICE 3:13-4:3

One other failure of the people: They accuse God of not seeing their righteous acts.

Their false charge 3:13-15

Accusation: They claim that when they are obedient, God fails to reward them.

God's just recompense 3:16-4:3

The prophet reminds them that anything they do is done before the Lord and He remembers it.

If they are faithful, He remembers it and repays them justly.

If they do wicked deeds, they will be punished.

EXHORTATION TO OBSERVE THE LAW 4:4

The prophecy is concluded with a warning 4:4-6

They are exhorted to be obedient to the commands of the Mosaic law 4:4

The basis for the appeal is the program of God:

PROMISE OF RECONCILING MINISTRY OF ELIJAH 4:5-6

He reminds them that Elijah is going to come and that he will perform a ministry of reconciliation.

In the light of the fulfillment of God's plan, the people are called to repent.

He urges them to live in a manner which reflects their position in God's program.

They should abandon their ritualistic, insincere worship, and offer true worship to God, from the heart.

God's love for them requires them to respond in love and obedience.

What are the implications of this prophecy for our lives today?

What do we share in common with Israel at that time?

What does God want us to do about it?

Any lessons for your own life for you to think about?