

MALACHI

The name Malachi means ‘my messenger’ and it has its origins in a Hebrew word meaning ‘to despatch as a deputy’. Malachi’s prophecy was the last of the writing prophets, and with him God closes the Old Testament canon historically and prophetically.

The Old Testament in the Christian Bible differs slightly from the Jewish Old Testament in that the Jewish Old Testament, - like our Old Testament, - begins with Genesis but ends, - not with Malachi, - but with II Chronicles 36. Jesus illustrates this in Lk. 11, ⁵⁰ That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; ⁵¹ From the blood of Abel [*Gen. 4:8*] unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple [*II Chron. 24:20 And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest [this is not Zechariah the prophet who was the son of Berechiah, but Zechariah the son of Jehoida, the high priest in the times of King Ahaziah of Israel and King Jehoash of Judah]*], which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. ²¹ And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.]

The order of the books is also different in that the Jewish Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections, - the Torah (Five Books of Moses), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketuvim*). The Hebrew text of the Old Testament is called the Masoretic Text because it is based upon the Hebrew of Jewish scribe-scholars known as Masoretes who worked between the 6th–10th centuries AD. They made it their special work to correct the faults which had crept into the text of the Old Testament during the Babylonian captivity. They also hoped to prevent for the future, its being corrupted by any alteration. The Authorized Version’s Old Testament text is based upon this Masoretic text.

... It is also interesting how the Jewish Hebrew Bible finishes with the words of the Persian King Cyrus who was considered as God’s ‘anointed’ (i.e. Messiah, *Is. 45:1* Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him), *II Chron. 36:22* Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, ²³ Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, *All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with*

him, and let him go up. ... Jews today understand these words to be prophesying a Messiah, - i.e. some great human *world* leader, favourable to the Israeli cause, - who will rule 'all the kingdoms of the earth', from Jerusalem, in a rebuilt temple ... *The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up* ... and hence, at the conclusion of every Passover, this Jewish hope is repeated, "Next Year in Jerusalem" (*le-shanah ha-ba'ah bi-Yerushalayim*).

Let's return to Malachi ... We know very little about him, and his name appears nowhere else in Scripture. This is not a problem since the priority of a messenger is the message he brings, not who are or where he comes from.

Malachi referred to sacrifices offered in the temple, - the second temple built by Zerubbabel was completed in 516 BC, - therefore, Malachi prophesied sometime later, **Mal. 1:7** *Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. ⁸ And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. ⁹ And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰ Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.*

At first, following the completion of the temple, there had been great excitement and hope among the people for a coming Messiah, however, as the years passed, the religious fervour evaporated resulting in the priests becoming increasingly complacent and corrupt. As a consequence, the people again turned away from God, **11** *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts. ¹² But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. ¹³ Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.*

Therefore, many years elapsed, and the people drifted spiritually further away from the Lord. Nothing was happening, - life was mundane, the covenants with Abraham, Jacob and Isaac had been forgotten, - and the people had given up their hope in the old promises from the Lord, which had been issued by the prophets. They became content to satisfy themselves with the form of religion which suited their spiritual condition, and this resulted in their abandonment of

the true faith. They had formulated a religious system suitable to their own whims and desires ... and they lost their expectation of a Messiah.

And here is how life became for them ... God judged them with poor crops and a faltering economy, **Mal. 2:3** Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces ... They had lost their historic relationship with Jehovah and they entered into alliances and allegiances which were blatantly contrary to God's will, **11** Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. There was also oppression of the poor, **3:5** And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. ... And they lost their zeal for God's house, - the temple, - because other issues had taken priority, **8** Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. **9** Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. **10** Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts.

In general, the people of Israel were treating God with disdain, **3:13** Your words have been stout [*hardened*] against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? **14** Ye have said, It is vain to serve God [*there is no point!*]: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? **15** And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. ... Evil has been reassessed and is now called good, and what was good previously has now been abandoned, **2:17** Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? ... they no longer had any knowledge of Him ... When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? ... Where did it all start? ... It began with the defilement in the priesthood, **1:6** A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. ... **2:7** For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. **8** But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. **9** Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law. ... The decline began in the 'pulpits'. Ungodly men with their ungodly messages!

However, the Lord had invested His covenants in the people of Israel, and they would never be rescinded, **1:2** I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, **3** And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. **4** Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. **5** And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel ... **9** And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us ... Malachi was telling the people the Lord had not finished with Israel, - He had not cast them off forever, - but instead, He remained faithful to His promise, **3:1** Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. **2** But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: **3** And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. **4** Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years ... **6** For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. **7** Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

But the Lord does not leave it there, - Israel's salvation does not depend upon Israel ... no more than our salvation depends upon us for salvation is all of God! ... And even though Israel woefully inquired, Wherein shall we return?, through grace God answered, **9** Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. **10** Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. **11** And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. **12** And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. **16** Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. **17** And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. **18** Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

With regards to the wicked, God has a time set apart to deal with them, **Mal. 4:1** For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. Indeed, that relates to many Old Testament prophecies, and that is also how Peter understood it, **II Peter 3:10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Malachi, then, - in the conclusion to his prophecy, - turns his attention to the Redeemed of the Lord, **Mal. 4:2** But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. **3** And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. And God's law will be reinstated, **4** Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. ... And that is also how Isaiah and Micah prophesied, **Is. 2:3** ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem [*cf. Micah 4:2*].

And finally, Malachi's closing words point towards the coming of 'Elijah', **5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord ... Has this prophecy already been fulfilled? Was John the Baptist this Elijah? ... Many of the Jews, including the disciples, considered it to be so, *cf.* **Mt. 17:10** And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? **11** And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. **12** But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. **13** Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Elijah is mentioned at least thirty times in the New Testament, and ten of those references relate him to John the Baptist. However, John the Baptist clearly said, **Jn. 1:21** And they [*the priests and Levites who came down from Jerusalem to examine him*] asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. ... There *were* similarities with Elijah, - John the Baptist worked in the spirit of Elijah, - but John the Baptist was not the Elijah Malachi prophesied. Yes, John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, - courageous, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he lived alone in the wilderness, and a servant who turned many people to the Lord ... but John the Baptist was not Elijah!

Instead, a straightforward reading of Malachi 4 promises Elijah himself will come, and that his coming will relate to the great and dreadful day of the Lord ... which is yet in the future ... because the great and dreadful day of the Lord has not happened yet! Then, who could this Elijah be referring to? ... It is suggested Elijah is one of the two witnesses described in Rev. 11:3-12 (the other witness being Moses ... Both Elijah and Moses met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration). If that *is* the case, following the ministry of the two witnesses, the Lord will pour out His wrath, as is described in **15** And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. [*cf.* **Dan. 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. **14** And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. ... **25** And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. **26** But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. **27** And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.] **16** And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, **17** Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. **18** And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. **19** And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail ... and into Rev. 16. ... The great and dreadful day of the Lord will burst upon this world in its fury.

And in relation to God's people, Malachi concludes his prophecy, **6** And he [*the Lord*] shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers [*i.e. they will return to the ancient covenants*], lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. ... None can afford to argue with God, as the Israelites in Malachi's day foolishly tried to do ... but unsuccessfully, because ultimately, - at the very last, - God always has the final word for this world is His creation ... He is its Master, and its future is in His hands.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI

I. The Denunciation of Israel's Sins (1:1–2:16)

- A. Reminder of God's Love for Israel (1:1–5)
 - 1. His electing grace (1:2)
 - 2. His blessing (1:3-5)
- B. Rebuke of the Priests (1:6–2:9)
 - 1. Contempt for God's altar (1:6–14)
 - 2. Contempt for God's glory (2:1–3)
 - 3. Contempt for God's law (2:4–9)
- C. Rebuke of the People (2:10–16)
 - 1. Marrying foreign wives (2:10–12)
 - 2. Hypocritical repentance (2:13)
 - 3. Divorcing their wives (2:14-16)

II. The Declaration of Israel's Judgment and Blessing (2:17–4:6)

- A. Where are the promised blessings? (2:17)
- B. The first messenger, - John the Baptist (3:1a)
- C. The second messenger, - Messiah (3:1b-6)
- D. Challenge to Repent (3:6–12)
 - 1. Robbing God (3:7-8)
 - 2. Robbing themselves (3:9-11)
 - 3. Robbing others (3:12)
- C. Criticism by Israel Against the Lord (3:13–15)
 - 1. The complainers (3:13-15)
 - 2. The believers (3:16-18)
 - 3. The evildoers (4:1-3)
 - 4. The preachers (4:4-6)