

# **Surveying the Text: Malachi**

Douglas Wilson

Christ Church - Moscow, ID

Sermon #1878 - A.D. September 13, 2015

## **INTRODUCTION:**

This book is of uncertain date, and is probably to be located sometime in the fifth century B.C. The problems that are addressed in the book are also problems in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and are addressed there as well. They include, but are not limited to, corrupt priests, mixed marriages, failure to tithe, social injustice, and the like.

## **THE TEXT:**

“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.” (Mal. 3:1).

## **UNDERSTANDING THIS BOOK:**

The book is not a simple prophetic denunciation, and neither is it a law court scenario. Rather it is more like a series of disputations, taking the rhetorical form called a diatribe. There are six of them found here, end to end. The form the disputations take is this: 1. a declaration is made, 2. a response comes back asking, “How so?” and 3. the declaration is then defended and explained.

The first dispute concerns whether Jehovah loves Israel (1:2-5). The second involves the offering of deficient sacrifices (1:6-2:9). The third is on the problem of marrying pagan wives and being unfaithful to their wives by covenant (2:10-16). The fourth dispute is over how they wearied Yahweh or Jehovah with their words (2:17-3:5). The fifth centers on an invitation to return to a real love for Jehovah (3:6-12). And the last dispute concerns their tendency to speak harshly about Jehovah (3:13-4:3).

The book then concludes with a coda about Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets respectively, representing between them who would be with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration.

## **A MISCELLANY:**

There are some basic principles we should glean from this book:

God describes His sovereign election in terms of love (Mal. 1:2-3). Jacob wants to know how God loves him, and God replies by showing His rejection of Esau.

Try doing that on a human level (Mal. 1:8). What we know and understand about respect and honor among fellow creatures ought to be used by us as we meditate on how to approach God. But this is easy to miss.

Tithing is an act of responsible love (Mal. 3: 8-12). Refusal to tithe is a refusal to honor God, and is in fact robbery of God. Those who withhold the tithes and offerings are trying to pillage heaven's treasuries, and all they succeed in doing is emptying their own. God doesn't listen to men who mistreat their wives (Mal. 2:13-14). The apostle Peter says essentially the same thing when he tells men to treat their wives right so that their prayers will not be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7)

### **THE REFINER'S FIRE:**

In our canonical arrangement, the book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament canon, and it leaves us looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. There are several elements in the book that cause us to lean forward in this way.

“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.” (Mal. 3:1).

This passage is quoted three times in the New Testament—Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27. Jesus Himself applies it to John the Baptist in Matthew and Luke, and Mark quotes Malachi and Isaiah as his narrational introduction of John the Baptist. But when the Messiah comes, the one whom you have delighted in and desired in the abstract, you will discover that His coming is fierce. He will come like a refiner's fire. Everybody wants to be pure, but being purified means being thrown in the cauldron.

What else will this ministry of preparation consist of?

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, And the heart of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6). So when the final Elijah comes (again the Baptist), he will bring a spirit of repentance, and that spirit will be found in how the fathers are turned to their children, and how the children are turned to their fathers (see. Matt. 11:14; 17:11-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17; John 1:21; Matt. 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8). This is what prepares the way for the Christ. This is part of what it means to level the mountains and raise the valleys.

All this is the ministry of preparation. What about the Messiah Himself? What will result when He comes?

“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” (Mal. 4:2).

This is no impotent salvation. This is not God giving our redemption a try. No, Christ came to save the world, not condemn it (John 3:17).

“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” (Mal. 1:11).

We are living in dawn of these glorious times. It is not through the law that Abraham and his seed will inherit the world, but rather through the righteousness of faith. And how is this righteousness spread? How is this conquering Word to go forth? It is through the proclamation of a crucified Christ, killed for you and resurrection for you. That is it. That is what God has done, is doing, and will do, world without end.



*PUBLISHED BY:* CANON PRESS • P.O. BOX 8729 • 205 E. 5TH ST. • MOSCOW, ID 83843  
WWW.CANONPRESS.COM • ORDERS@CANONPRESS.COM  
PHONE 800-488-2034 • FAX 208-882-1568