



Malachi: A Final Messenger

While the Temple had been rebuilt, God's people had lagged in their diligence of faithful living. Just building the Temple was not enough, and neither was going through vain motions of ritualistic worship. God wanted His people to be holy, and that required true worship and faithful living. Ezra and Nehemiah did much to rebuke the sinfulness of the people, but God also sent Malachi as

one final prophet during the Old Testament. God speaks through the prophet, and takes up one disputation after another to show the error of the people. He also anticipates the people's rebuttal and complaint, and corrects those as well. Some of the key themes that are addressed are:

God's Love: God had chosen Israel and shown her great favor. The people questioned God's love, but the lack of blessing was because of their rebellion, not because of a lack of God's love.

Pure Worship: God rebukes the priests, for they have led the people into polluted worship. While they go through the motions, they do not truly honor or fear God. They offer polluted sacrifices of the lame and sick animals. Sacrificing a diseased lamb isn't much of a sacrifice, but that's why they offered them! When worship to God is not sacrificial, it becomes empty and meaningless. Worse still is when even the leaders of God's people partake in this type of worship, and lead others to do the same!

Marriage: The people suffered from two marriage issues: First, they intermarried with foreign people who were not God-fearing people. This had been condemned in the Law and history had proven such decisions to be disastrous. Secondly, divorce was common. Marriage is a sacred institution established by God. Thus, God's people should seek a godly spouse, and then they should remain faithful to them. God hates divorce, for it goes against His plan and design which is meant to benefit mankind.

Justice: The people had a distorted sense of justice. They asked where the God of justice was, but they called those who did evil good (2:17)!

A New Messenger: More than any other book of prophecy, Malachi anticipates the arrival of John the Baptist—God's messenger sent to prepare the way. After Malachi, God would not speak through a prophet for 400 years! Thus, Malachi looks longingly to the time when the silence would be broken and God's messenger would come, for then not only would silence be broken, but the Messiah would come.

Robbing God: The people are accused of robbing God because they withhold tithes and contributions. They complained that they weren't blessed by God, but God lets them know it's because they have not given as they were commanded. When God's people are stingy and ungenerous, they should not expect bountiful blessing! Worse still, when we refuse to give as we should, we are actually guilty of robbing God.

Judgment: Most of the books of prophecy, even the sternest ones, end on a note of hope. It is interesting then, that the final book of prophecy does not. Instead, it ends on a note of judgment. In fact, the final word of the book is "curse." That isn't to say there is no hope. The final verses speak again of the coming of John the Baptist, who of course heralded the coming of the Christ. While the coming of God's promised One was a great blessing, it also represented judgment. God warns the arrogant in Judah (and all arrogance) for those that do not humble themselves will not be saved, but they will be struck and cursed. While this may not be the ending we anticipate, it is a fitting end to the Old Testament. The Law of Moses had no power to save, only to curse. Thus, when the Old Testament ends, we are left wanting and needing the saving power of the Christ even more!

"That You May Grow Thereby..."

A weekly Bible reading plan



Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi Post-Exilic Prophets: Part 2

Overview

This week we will finish the Old Testament! Last week we read the prophecy of Haggai and most of Zechariah. Their messages were to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem but hadn't finished building the temple. Haggai and Zechariah stirred the people to action, calling them out of their self-serving mentality and into zealous service. If the people expected God's blessing, then they needed to get busy doing God's work, starting with rebuilding the Temple! Many years later, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, God's people were floundering

once again. They had finished the Temple and they rejected idolatry, but their lives displayed their true hearts. Their worship practices, ethics, and attitudes showed they were partaking in mere ritualism and formalism. While they didn't truly serve God, they wondered why God wasn't blessing them. Onto the scene came Malachi (along with Ezra and Nehemiah), a prophet of whom very little is known other than his name and message. Haggai and Zechariah and called the people to rebuild the Temple. Malachi admonishes the people to rebuild their worship and lives. In a short yet strong book, Malachi offers one final word from God before four centuries of silence would settle over the nation, only to be broken when God spoke through none other than John the Baptist!

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Zechariah 9-10
Tuesday: Zechariah 11-12
Wednesday: Zechariah 13-14
Thursday: Malachi 1-2
Friday: Malachi 3-4



THE SHEPHERD and the Shepherds

In the final chapters of Zechariah, the prophet draws heavily on the metaphor of shepherds. In fact, shepherds show up 12 times in chapters 10 through 13! Sometimes the prophet speaks of Judah's leaders as shepherds, and rebukes their carelessness. The people wander like sheep without a shepherd, and thus God's anger burns against the shepherds (10:2-3). God promises to punish the leaders and care for His flock directly. This is an important reminder that the leaders of God's people are often called shepherds, but they are always under-shepherds. That is, the flock is not their own; it is God's and He is the true shepherd. Under-shepherds are to do as the Master Shepherd wants and desires, and they are to carefully provide for and protect the Master Shepherd's flock. When they don't, they will face punishment.

Zechariah also speaks of another shepherd; the one whom would be the Good Shepherd. Amazingly, however, this shepherd will be rejected. Zechariah 13:7 says, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..." Matthew 26:31 confirms this passage speaks of Jesus. How tragic that the good Shepherd was rejected and slain by His own sheep! And yet, it was part of God's plan. When the Good Shepherd became the sacrificial lamb, He redeemed the sheep that were destined for destruction!



Malachi: A Final Messenger

While the Temple had been rebuilt, God's people had lagged in their diligence of faithful living. Just building the Temple was not enough, and neither was going through vain motions of ritualistic worship. God wanted His people to be holy, and that required true worship and faithful living. Ezra and Nehemiah did much to rebuke the sinfulness of the people, but God also sent Malachi as

one final prophet during the Old Testament. God speaks through the prophet, and takes up one disputation after another to show the error of the people. He also anticipates the people's rebuttal and complaint, and corrects those as well. Some of the key themes that are addressed are:

God's Love: God had chosen Israel and shown her great favor. The people questioned God's love, but the lack of blessing was because of their rebellion, not because of a lack of God's love.

Pure Worship: God rebukes the priests, for they have led the people into polluted worship. While they go through the motions, they do not truly honor or fear God. They offer polluted sacrifices of the lame and sick animals. Sacrificing a diseased lamb isn't much of a sacrifice, but that's why they offered them! When worship to God is not sacrificial, it becomes empty and meaningless. Worse still is when even the leaders of God's people partake in this type of worship, and lead others to do the same!

Marriage: The people suffered from two marriage issues: First, they intermarried with foreign people who were not God-fearing people. This had been condemned in the Law and history had proven such decisions to be disastrous. Secondly, divorce was common. Marriage is a sacred institution established by God. Thus, God's people should seek a godly spouse, and then they should remain faithful to them. God hates divorce, for it goes against His plan and design which is meant to benefit mankind.

Justice: The people had a distorted sense of justice. They asked where the God of justice was, but they called those who did evil good (2:17)!

A New Messenger: More than any other book of prophecy, Malachi anticipates the arrival of John the Baptist—God's messenger sent to prepare the way. After Malachi, God would not speak through a prophet for 400 years! Thus, Malachi looks longingly to the time when the silence would be broken and God's messenger would come, for then not only would silence be broken, but the Messiah would come.

Robbing God: The people are accused of robbing God because they withhold tithes and contributions. They complained that they weren't blessed by God, but God lets them know it's because they have not given as they were commanded. When God's people are stingy and ungenerous, they should not expect bountiful blessing! Worse still, when we refuse to give as we should, we are actually guilty of robbing God.

Judgment: Most of the books of prophecy, even the sternest ones, end on a note of hope. It is interesting then, that the final book of prophecy does not. Instead, it ends on a note of judgment. In fact, the final word of the book is "curse." That isn't to say there is no hope. The final verses speak again of the coming of John the Baptist, who of course heralded the coming of the Christ. While the coming of God's promised One was a great blessing, it also represented judgment. God warns the arrogant in Judah (and all arrogance) for those that do not humble themselves will not be saved, but they will be struck and cursed. While this may not be the ending we anticipate, it is a fitting end to the Old Testament. The Law of Moses had no power to save, only to curse. Thus, when the Old Testament ends, we are left wanting and needing the saving power of the Christ even more!

"That You May Grow Thereby..."

A weekly Bible reading plan



Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi Post-Exilic Prophets: Part 2

Overview

This week we will finish the Old Testament! Last week we read the prophecy of Haggai and most of Zechariah. Their messages were to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem but hadn't finished building the temple. Haggai and Zechariah stirred the people to action, calling them out of their self-serving mentality and into zealous service. If the people expected God's blessing, then they needed to get busy doing God's work, starting with rebuilding the Temple! Many years later, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, God's people were floundering

once again. They had finished the Temple and they rejected idolatry, but their lives displayed their true hearts. Their worship practices, ethics, and attitudes showed they were partaking in mere ritualism and formalism. While they didn't truly serve God, they wondered why God wasn't blessing them. Onto the scene came Malachi (along with Ezra and Nehemiah), a prophet of whom very little is known other than his name and message. Haggai and Zechariah and called the people to rebuild the Temple. Malachi admonishes the people to rebuild their worship and lives. In a short yet strong book, Malachi offers one final word from God before four centuries of silence would settle over the nation, only to be broken when God spoke through none other than John the Baptist!

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Zechariah 9-10
Tuesday: Zechariah 11-12
Wednesday: Zechariah 13-14
Thursday: Malachi 1-2
Friday: Malachi 3-4



THE SHEPHERD and the Shepherds

In the final chapters of Zechariah, the prophet draws heavily on the metaphor of shepherds. In fact, shepherds show up 12 times in chapters 10 through 13! Sometimes the prophet speaks of Judah's leaders as shepherds, and rebukes their carelessness. The people wander like sheep without a shepherd, and thus God's anger burns against the shepherds (10:2-3). God promises to punish the leaders and care for His flock directly. This is an important reminder that the leaders of God's people are often called shepherds, but they are always under-shepherds. That is, the flock is not their own; it is God's and He is the true shepherd. Under-shepherds are to do as the Master Shepherd wants and desires, and they are to carefully provide for and protect the Master Shepherd's flock. When they don't, they will face punishment.

Zechariah also speaks of another shepherd; the one whom would be the Good Shepherd. Amazingly, however, this shepherd will be rejected. Zechariah 13:7 says, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..." Matthew 26:31 confirms this passage speaks of Jesus. How tragic that the good Shepherd was rejected and slain by His own sheep! And yet, it was part of God's plan. When the Good Shepherd became the sacrificial lamb, He redeemed the sheep that were destined for destruction!