

## Malachi--Meeting the Challenge of Spiritual Stagnation God's Last OT Word to Israel

**Intro:** This is our final lesson on Malachi; and we have been seen that God speaks to Israel through Malachi during a time of spiritual stagnation. In six distinct dialogues God reveals the manifestations of Israel's spiritual condition and how it should be corrected. Hopefully we've benefitted from listening in on the conversation, learning how to avoid these same problems in our spiritual lives.

**Now as Malachi closes the canon of the OT, God gives through him one last word to Israel:**

*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Mal. 4:4-6)*

**What does God seek to accomplish in this final statement to Israel by which God's prophetic message is completed and His voice is "silent" for over four centuries?**

### **An Exhortation**

*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*

***There is so much packed in that single sentence.***

First it acknowledges the historicity of Moses and the revelation that is attributed to him in the Pentateuch.

God's acknowledges Moses as His servant indicating that his mission was to speak faithfully for the Lord.

What Moses spoke was the command of God. We see the principle of God's authority resident in those who give His law.

What God said to Moses He said to "all Israel." No one was exempt from obeying the terms of the covenant God had made with their ancestors.

Here at the end of the OT we see that God is still urging His people to keep those statutes and ordinances that He had given through Moses though that they had been revealed over a thousand years before! Time does not abrogate the authority of God's written word!

The word "remember" simply suggests to remember in order to keep or obey them.

***And thus God's last word to Israel is to urge them to keep the covenant that He had made with Israel at Horeb or Sinai. They would not be able to receive the Messiah nor the kingdom God had promised to them without having learned to obey God.***

***Just as the kingdom had been lost through disobedience, the hope of the restored kingdom belonged to those who repented and obeyed God's law. To that end God makes:***

#### **A Promise**

*Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, The great and terrible day of the Lord refers most likely to a time of God's wrath against all His enemies and His deliverance of those who call upon Him.*

Joel likewise spoke of this great day as a day of both deliverance and judgment:

*And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. (Joel 2:30-32)*

#### ***Before that day, God would raise up "Elijah the prophet."***

It might have been possible for the people of Israel to understand this literally--that the ancient prophet Elijah would be raised from the dead as a sign that the great day of salvation and judgment had come.

By the first century it was commonly believed that the former prophet Elijah would be raised before the consummation of the age. The disciples also indicated to Jesus that the scribes commonly believed that Elijah would arise before the coming of the Messiah:

*And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (Mt. 17:10)*

The belief is reflected in the question some of the religious leaders asked John:

*And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he \*said, "I am not." (Jn. 1:21)*

However, knowing that Elijah had died many years before, Malachi's words might more reasonably be taken in the sense that a person like Elijah the prophet would arise. In a similar way the Messiah is often portrayed as like David.

On this point the NT makes clear that the "Elijah" of Malachi was none other than John the Baptist.

At John's birth Zacharias indicated that his son was Malachi's Elijah the prophet:

*And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the*

*righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*  
(Lk. 1:17)

John himself identified with Elijah in his dress and demeanor.  
*Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.*  
(Mt. 3:4); Cf. 1 Kg. 1:8

Jesus indicated that John was the promised "Elijah."  
*For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.*  
(Mt. 11:13-14)

And in their question about the scribes, Jesus answered:  
*Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.* (Mt. 17:11-13)

I should also probably mention here that premillennial interpreters of the Scriptures think that the prophet Elijah will be raised before the end of the world.

***The prophet would "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to the fathers." But what does this mean?***

Some see it as an expression of family harmony; but it is more likely a statement of the restoration of Israel to the faith and values of its earlier days.

In this case, "the children" are, through repentance, brought back to the state of obedience that their fathers had possessed.

This idea has already been mentioned twice in Malachi.

The priests are urged to restore the attitudes and practices of Levi their ancestor (Mal. 2:4-9).

Malachi also mentions that in the future God's people will worship him as "in the days of old and as in former years." (Mal. 3:4).

Compare this idea with the NT quotes that do not merely quote Malachi on this point, but explain the meaning of his terminology:  
*And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16-17)*

***And so God's promise is that He will raise a great prophet like Elijah before the consummation of the age to bring His people to repentance so that they may be able to enter into the Messiah's kingdom.***

## **A Warning**

*Already God had spoken of a great and terrible day of the Lord. Inasmuch as such a day would be a day of wrath to the disobedient, then God's people have already been duly warned. However, God adds this final warning:*

*...lest I come and strike the land with a curse*

*Every student of the Law would know what this means. From the beginning, Israel's blessing was contingent on their faithfulness to the covenant. When they were disobedient, God struck the land with a curse that took away its fruitfulness.*

The word "curse" translates "cherem," the Hebrew word reserved for the total destruction of the Canaanites.

Imagine closing the OT canon with that word ringing in your ears--

"Curse!"

### **Summarizing God's Final Word to Israel**

*All of God's actions were leading to a great time of deliverance and judgment through the coming Messiah and His kingdom. Those nations who rebelled against God would be judged; and even those among the nation of Israel who did not repent would likewise experience the covenant curses of God as well.*

*Simply put, God's final word to Israel is: Overcome your spiritual stagnation and get ready for the kingdom by keeping the covenant promises you made to God!*

*That's why when John came he preached a message of repentance urging God's people to believing on Jesus as the Messiah. And he solemnly warned them that if they would not repent then that same Jesus would "burn them like chaff in unquenchable fire." (Mt. 3:12)*

### **An important message for us**

*Malachi's prophecy provides evidence to us that Jesus is indeed the promised king for Israel.*

If we can identify the Elijah of Malachi's prophet, then we can know who the Messiah is.

The evidence that John is that Elijah confirms that Jesus is the Christ, since John point to Him "as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (Jn. 1:29).

Though they rejected and killed Him, God vindicated Him as His chosen one to rule over His kingdom by his resurrection from the dead

*Through His sacrifice and grace, He offers us citizenship in His kingdom.*

It is interesting that the OT ends with the threatening word "curse;" Jesus began His mountain sermon with the hopeful word "blessed." (JFB Commentary).

Those Jews who repented and believed in the Messiah were given the opportunity to enter the kingdom; but those who remained impenitent perished in the destruction of Jerusalem, and will experience eternal punishment at the last day.

As unbelieving Gentiles outside the covenants of promise, we have been granted access to the kingdom of God to be fellow-heirs with those believing Jews who received their king.

The church is the fulfillment of the promised kingdom.

***In order for us to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom we too must live in obedience to the covenant or also experience the final curse of God.***

The offer of grace is not license to ignore God or His spiritual or moral requirements.

Even the Messiah said:

*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Mt.*

*7:21)*

***But unlike the hard-hearted Jews of the past, we serve not in oldness of the letter, but in newness of the Spirit.***

Through the Spirit's message of God's love, we have been transformed from within to serve God with our hearts, His law of love written within to be expressed day by day in a life of love for God and for our fellowman.

Those who live under the new covenant of grace can be assured that the righteous requirements of the Law are fulfilled in us, so that we are prepared to enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord.

***Day by day we live in hope of entering the eternal kingdom of God, doing what we can to spread the gospel of the kingdom to those around us and living out its principles in our lives day by day.***

**Conclusion: If we've understood Malachi's message, we are in a lot better position to avoid the spiritual malaise and stagnation that displeases God. Instead we are encouraged to live an obedient life that looks forward to the final day of the Lord when He will deliver the righteous and punish the wicked.**