

What's the Message – Lesson 85

In this lesson we look at the last book of prophecy in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that the message of this prophet will be seen as pertinent and applicable to us as it was to the Israelites of old, and that we would be encouraged and strengthened to be faithful to our heavenly Father. Amen.

In our last three lessons we have seen how the people, under the leadership of Ezra, concluded that since their captivity in Babylon was punishment for failing to keep God's Law, they would from now on make sure that they kept it, all the way down to the last detail. So they became a law community, and emphasized that mixed marriages with pagans around them would be totally forbidden. We also saw a faithful worker, Nehemiah, lead the people into a rebuilding of the city walls and gates, and re-establish the proper sacrificial practice.

It was a time of emphasizing the Word of God that had been written by Moses and the prophets of earlier years. It became a time when they saw the inheritance of a great library of the written word of God as being sufficient for all their needs. Surely this was enough to guide them to be faithful sons of Yahweh. As John Bright writes: "Where the Word of God is plainly written for all to read, there is little need or place for a prophet voice to speak it. The time soon came when there arose no more prophets in Israel."

And so Malachi – who was a contemporary of Nehemiah – became the last prophet voice for some 400 years until John the Baptist began his ministry as the forerunner of Jesus. The book of Malachi can be considered as having two parts, the first dealing with the unfaithfulness of Israel, and the second part dealing with the Lord's coming.

Malachi first rebukes the priests for their unfaithfulness, for dishonoring God with their improper sacrifices, and for failing to teach God's Law. Beginning with verse six of chapter one, Malachi denounces them with these words: *It is you, O priests, who show contempt for My name. . . . When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer*

them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands? Is that not wrong?

And then in chapter two, he derides them as failures at the job of being a teacher: *If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor My name, says the Lord Almighty, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. . . . For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction . . . But you have turned from the way, and by your teaching have caused many to stumble.*

Malachi likewise berates the people, especially “for marrying the daughter of a foreign god” and for divorcing “the wife of your youth.” He sums it up by saying, *So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.*

But now Malachi changes gears, so to speak. He turns his message to the coming of the Lord. As we read in chapter three, *See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord who you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger whom you desire . . . But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? . . . He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.*

And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. . . . All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

How much plainer can the message be made? Here God is speaking to us directly through His messenger. There are two kinds of people: the righteous who serve God, and the wicked who do not.

The righteous will be healed of their sin and reconciled to Him, while the wicked will be punished. Don't these words apply just as much to us today as they did to those in Judah long ago? Especially since we have the insight to see that here Malachi is pointing to the coming of Jesus, the Anointed One. It is the same message that Yahweh had been trying to teach His children ever since Abraham and Moses. It is the same message the prophets from Samuel all the way to Malachi have preached. It is the proper note on which to end the Old Testament and begin turning our focus forward to the coming of Jesus.

Next time we will summarize the lessons we have learned from the Old Testament.