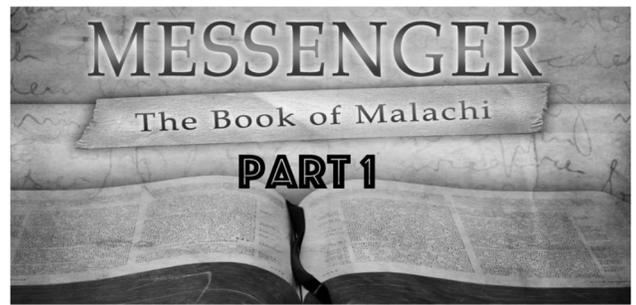


THE BOOK OF MALACHI – “MESSENGERS OF THE LORD”

Trinity Lutheran Church – Norman, OK.

Date: 2-17-19 Lesson: 1



A. THE TEXT: (Malachi 1:1-14)

The oracle of **the word of the Lord** to Israel by Malachi.

(2) "I have loved you," says **the Lord**. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares **the Lord**. "Yet I have loved Jacob (3) but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." (4) If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," **the Lord of hosts** says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom **the Lord** is angry forever.'"

(5) Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "**Great is the Lord** beyond the border of Israel!" (6) "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says **the Lord of hosts** to you, O priests, who despise **my name**. But you say, 'How have we despised **your name**?' (7) By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that **the Lord's table** may be despised. (8) When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says **the Lord of hosts**.

(9) And now entreat **the favor of God**, that **he** may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says **the Lord of hosts**. (10) Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says **the Lord of hosts**, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. (11) For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says **the Lord of hosts**.

(12) But you profane it when you say that **the Lord's table** is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. (13) But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says **the Lord of hosts**. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says **the Lord**. (14) Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to **the Lord** what is blemished. For **I am a great King**, says **the Lord of hosts**, and **my name will be feared among the nations**.

B. STUDY GUIDE

God's Grace in Malachi †

Malachi, which means "my messenger," (is the last prophet of the grace of God until John the Baptist appears approximately 400 years later.) And so it is fitting for Malachi to prophesy concerning the forerunner of Jesus, who will proclaim: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). The prophet predicts the function of John: "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty" (3:1). Jesus' forerunner is referred to as Elijah in the concluding verses of Malachi: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (4:5-6; cf. Mt 11:13-14; 17:12-13; Mk 9:11-13; Lk 1:17).

Author

The book is ascribed to Malachi, whose name means "my messenger." (Since the term occurs in 3:1, and since both prophets and priests were called messengers of the Lord (see 2:7; Hag 1:13), some have thought "Malachi" to be only a title that tradition has given the author.) The view has been supported by appeal to the early Greek translation (the Septuagint), which translates the term in 1:1 "his messenger" rather than as a proper noun. The matter, however, remains uncertain, and it is still very likely that Malachi was in fact the author's name.

Background

Spurred on by the prophetic activity of Haggai and Zechariah, the returned exiles under the leadership of their governor Zerubbabel finished the temple in 516 B.C. In 458 the community was strengthened by the coming of Ezra the priest and several thousand more Jews. King Artaxerxes of Persia encouraged Ezra to develop the temple worship (Ezr 7:17) and to make sure the law of Moses was being obeyed (Ezr 7:25-26).

Thirteen years later (445) the same Persian king permitted his cupbearer Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls (Ne 6:15). As newly appointed governor, Nehemiah also spearheaded reforms to help the poor (Ne 5:2-13), and he convinced the people to shun mixed marriages, to keep the Sabbath (Ne 10:30-31) and to bring their tithes and offerings faithfully (Ne 10:37-39).

In 433 B.C., Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into sin once more. Later, however, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to discover that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was broken, the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt (Ne 13:7-31). Several of these sins are condemned by Malachi (see 1:6-14; 2:14-16; 3:8-11).

that the two leaders were contemporaries. Malachi may have been written after Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 B.C. or during his second period as governor. Since the governor mentioned in 1:8 (see note there) probably was not Nehemiah, the first alternative may be more likely. (Malachi was most likely the last prophet of the OT era (though some place Joel later).)

Themes and Theology

Although the Jews had been allowed to return from exile and rebuild the temple, several discouraging factors brought about a general religious malaise: (1) Their land remained but a small province in the backwaters of the Persian empire, (2) the glorious future announced by the prophets (including the other postexilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah) had not (yet) been realized, and (3) their God had not (yet) come to his temple (3:1) with majesty and power (as celebrated in Ps 68) to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the nations. Doubting God's covenant love (1:2) and no longer trusting his justice (2:17; 3:14-15), the Jews of the restored community began to lose hope. So their worship degenerated into a listless perpetuation of mere forms, and they no longer took the law seriously.

(Malachi rebukes their doubt of God's love (1:2-5) and the faithlessness of both priests (1:6-2:9) and people (2:10-16). To their charge that God is unjust ("Where is the God of justice?" 2:17) because he has failed to come in judgment to exalt his people, Malachi answers with an announcement and a warning. The Lord they seek will come—but he will come "like a refiner's fire" (3:1-4). He will come to judge—but he will judge his people first (3:5).

Because the Lord does not change in his commitments and purpose, Israel has not been completely destroyed for her persistent unfaithfulness (3:6). But only through repentance and reformation will she again experience God's blessing (3:6-12). Those who honor the Lord will be spared when he comes to judge (3:16-18).

In conclusion, Malachi once more reassures and warns his readers that "the day [that great and dreadful day of the LORD, 4:5] is coming" and that "it will burn like a furnace" (4:1). In that day the righteous will rejoice, and "you will trample down the wicked" (4:1-3). So "remember the law of my servant Moses" (4:4). To prepare his people for that day the Lord will send "the prophet Elijah" to call them back to the godly ways of their forefathers (4:5-6).

C. LIFE APPLICATION Theme: "Messengers of the Lord," then and now, proclaim to each generation
The Law and The Gospel - properly distinguished - but boldly spoken

Outline

- I. Title (1:1)
- II. Introduction: God's Covenant Love for Israel Affirmed (1:2-5)
- III. Israel's Unfaithfulness Rebuked (1:6-2:16)
 - A. The Unfaithfulness of the Priests (1:6-2:9)
 1. They dishonor God in their sacrifices (1:6-14)
 2. They do not faithfully teach the law (2:1-9)
 - B. The Unfaithfulness of the People (2:10-16)
- IV. The Lord's Coming Announced (2:17-4:6)
 - A. The Lord Will Come to Purify the Priests and Judge the People (2:17-3:5)
 - B. A Call to Repentance in View of the Lord's Coming (3:6-18)
 1. An exhortation to faithful giving (3:6-12)
 2. An exhortation to faithful service (3:13-18)
 - C. The Day of the Lord Announced (ch. 4)