

ST. ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sarasota, Florida
A CONVERSATION ON MALACHI
Session Plan #1

OPENING PRAYER

MUTUAL SHARING OF GOD'S PEACE

YOUR FACILITATOR'S VIEW OF MALACHI'S IMPORTANCE:

Malachi's message is a gripping account of how God's ancient people, living 5 centuries before Christ, got "off track," and the consequences of what happens when God's instructions are disobeyed. Parallels could and sometimes *have been* drawn to some of the things going on in the world today, although I see no direct and specific identifiable connections. In Malachi's prophecy, God's people were warned to keep in remembrance the things which they had received. {cf. *Malachi 4:4-6* Common English Bible (CEB)}

***⁴ Remember the instruction from Moses, my servant,
to whom I gave instruction and rules for all Israel at Horeb.***

***⁵ Look, I am sending Elijah the prophet to you,
before the great and terrifying day of the LORD arrives.***

***⁶ Turn the hearts of the parents to the children
and the hearts of the children to their parents.
Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.***

Many prophecies of the Old Testament speak of a need for "turning away" by God's people from the error of their ways. Just as was seen in Malachi's day, one cannot look at our 21st century modern world without observing some of the same conditions in our time.

During the time of Malachi, God's temple in Jerusalem was completely rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah. Yet, in less than 100 years, spiritual apathy had rebounded and characterized God's people. They disregarded His Message; did not pay their tithes and offerings; intermarried with foreigners; and, the practice of divorce was widespread. These Jews were sacrificing offerings that were blemished and unacceptable. Instead of giving their best, God was regularly given leftovers. To make matters worse, priests were guilty of not teaching people the way of God. The idea of needing true repentance before God was non-existent. Behaviors observed and experienced among the population could only be described as atrocious!

Israel was condemned because of her overall attitude toward God. Malachi's message was: "***There must be a change!***" But the Jews complained of being tired of serving God. It brought them no material prosperity; yet, those who ignored God seemed to be prospering greatly and were not suffering any Divine discipline.

As in Malachi's time, people today seem no different. God is very often an afterthought in the minds of many of our contemporaries. That is, until, some great tragedy arises – personally or nationally. Then, we want special prayers - even the declaration of a national day of prayer! Your facilitator believes that if God's people are to have hope in this day and age, there must again be a conscious turn back to Him. We have a need to study Malachi's ancient prophecy in order to be reminded that we, too, are a carnal people primarily in search of worldly things. Scripture spoke of a time when "*men's hearts would fail them.*" Is that what is happening right now?

A) THE PROPHET -

1. **MALACHI** – means **“Messenger of Jehovah”** or **“my messenger.”**
 - a) The Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, treats this name as a common noun: ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ, (by the hand of his messenger).
 - b) While some have considered it to be a title, rather than a name, this is unlikely since such a usage is not found among any other of the prophets.
 - c) The name carries the thought that this prophet brought a message from Jehovah to His people.
 - d) He is the last of the O.T. prophets; thus, he is the connecting link between O.T. prophecy and N.T. fulfillment
2. No additional information is known of Malachi other than what is revealed in the book.
 - a) Malachi is assumed to have come from somewhere in Judah, since he prophesied in the vicinity of Jerusalem.
 - b) There is no certain and final record of his death and burial
 - c) Speculation exists that he may have been buried in a catacomb located on the upper slope of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. This tomb is also sometimes spoken of as the burial location of the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who are believed to have lived during the 5th-6th centuries B.C.E.

B) DATE OF THE PROPHECY –

1. **445 to 432 B.C.E.**
 - a) About the same time as the Book of Nehemiah
 - b) **Who was Nehemiah?** He was the **cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, King of Persia**. In the 20th year of that monarch’s reign (445/444 BC), Nehemiah learned that the Jewish remnant in Judah were in distress and that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. He asked the king for permission to return and rebuild the city. Artaxerxes sent him to Judah as governor of the province with a mission to rebuild; he was given letters explaining the king’s support for the venture, and provision for timber from the king’s forest. Once there, Nehemiah defied the opposition of Judah’s enemies on all sides—Samaritans, Ammonites, Arabs and Philistines—and rebuilt the walls within 52 days.
 - c) Malachi is thought to have written around the time of Nehemiah’s visit to Babylon in 433 B.C.E. {cf. Nehemiah 13:6 – ***“I wasn’t in Jerusalem while this was happening because I had gone to Babylon’s King Artaxerxes in the thirty-second year of the king. After some time, I asked the king’s permission.”***} (King Artaxerxes ruled Persia 465-424 B.C.E.) In support of this dating are these further historical facts:
 - The Temple project had already been completed and Mosaic sacrifices were being offered: {cf. Malachi 1:7-10 – ***“By approaching my altar with polluted food. But you say, “How have we polluted it?” When you say, “The table of the LORD can be despised.”⁸ If you bring a blind animal to sacrifice, isn’t that evil? If you bring a lame or sick one, isn’t that evil? Would you bring it to your governor? Would he be pleased with it or accept you? says the LORD of heavenly forces.⁹ So now ask God to be gracious to us. After what you have done, will he accept you? says the LORD of heavenly forces.¹⁰ Who among you will shut the doors of the temple so that you don’t burn something on my altar in vain? I take no delight in you, says the LORD of heavenly forces. I won’t accept a grain offering from your hand.”***}
 - A Persian governor, not Nehemiah, was ruling the Jews at this time (see vs. 8 of the passage directly above)

d) The sins denounced by Malachi were the same sins that Nehemiah dealt with during his second term as governor:

- **Laxity & Corruption among priests** (Nehemiah 13: ¹⁻³ *Also on that same day there was a reading from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. It was found written there that no Ammonite or Moabite was permitted to enter the congregation of God, because they hadn't welcomed the People of Israel with food and drink; they even hired Balaam to work against them by cursing them, but our God turned the curse into a blessing. When they heard the reading of The Revelation, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.* ⁴⁻⁵ *Some time before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of The Temple of God. He was close to Tobiah and had made available to him a large storeroom that had been used to store Grain-Offerings, incense, worship vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil for the Levites, singers, and security guards, and the offerings for the priests.* ⁶⁻⁹ *When this was going on I wasn't there in Jerusalem; in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon, I had traveled back to the king. But later I asked for his permission to leave again. I arrived in Jerusalem and learned of the wrong that Eliashib had done in turning over to him a room in the courts of The Temple of God. I was angry, really angry, and threw everything in the room out into the street, all of Tobiah's stuff. Then I ordered that they ceremonially cleanse the room. Only then did I put back the worship vessels of The Temple of God, along with the Grain-Offerings and the incense.* The Message (MSG)
- **Mixed Marriages** (Nehemiah 13: ²³⁻²⁷ *Also in those days I saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Half the children couldn't even speak the language of Judah; all they knew was the language of Ashdod or some other tongue. So I took those men to task, gave them a piece of my mind, even slapped some of them and jerked them by the hair. I made them swear to God: "Don't marry your daughters to their sons; and don't let their daughters marry your sons—and don't you yourselves marry them! Didn't Solomon the king of Israel sin because of women just like these? Even though there was no king quite like him, and God loved him and made him king over all Israel, foreign women were his downfall. Do you call this obedience—engaging in this extensive evil, showing yourselves faithless to God by marrying foreign wives?"* ²⁸ *One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I drove him out of my presence.* The Message (MSG)
- **Tithes neglected** (Nehemiah 13: ¹⁰⁻¹³ *And then I learned that the Levites hadn't been given their regular food allotments. So the Levites and singers who led the services of worship had all left and gone back to their farms. I called the officials on the carpet, "Why has The Temple of God been abandoned?" I got everyone back again and put them back on their jobs so that all Judah was again bringing in the tithe of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms. I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms. I made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their right-hand man. These men had a reputation for honesty and hard work. They were responsible for distributing the rations to their brothers.* The Message (MSG)

C) THE WORLD SETTING –



1. **536 B.C.E. – Zerubbabel** led a group of approximately 50,000 Jews from Babylon (where they had been enslaved in captivity since the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.) back to the holy city, after being freed by virtue of a decree made by Cyrus, Medo-Persian king, in the first year of his reign. He was a governor of the Persian Province of Judah (Haggai 1:1) and the grandson of Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.E.), penultimate king of Judah. Zerubbabel also laid the foundation of the Second Temple in Jerusalem soon after. In accounts in the Hebrew Bible that mention Zerubbabel, he is always associated with the high priest who returned with him, Joshua (Jeshua) son of Jozadak (Jehozadak). Together, these two men led the first wave of Jewish returnees from exile and began to rebuild the Temple.

2. **520-516 B.C.E. –**
 - a) Prophetic works of **Haggai** and **Zechariah** encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem
 - b) Temple is known to have been completed and dedicated in 516 B.C.E.

3. **458 B.C.E. – Ezra** led 2,000+ exiled Jews back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:1-34). This second group returned 79 years after the first group.

4. **445 B.C.E. – Nehemiah** returned with the third group of exiled Jews (Nehemiah 2) {prior notes about Nehemiah are found in “B1b” above.}

D) THE RELIGIOUS SETTING –

1. After the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon, their religious health quickly deteriorated. There was widespread indifference to both the moral and ceremonial aspects of keeping God's Law
 - a) They were weary of observing the practice of sacrifice(s)
 - b) Religious matters had become routine; those matters were lacking in any real significance either for the priests or for the general population
 - c) Pagan and other questionable practices were much more common in the land.
 - d) Greed was experienced everywhere
 - e) Widespread corruption existed in governmental circles
 - f) When they did offer sacrifices, the priests were accepting as offerings numerous animals which were sick, lame and defiled, rather than the "best."
 - g) Jewish men were marrying non-Jewish women (2:11-12), and were divorcing their prior wives to do it. (*this resulted in re-introducing foreign gods back into the land*)
 - h) People had grown restless and believed they were in danger from their enemies around them
 - i) Crops were poor
 - j) Social abuses were widespread; home and family life were in a state of decay
2. Nehemiah had come back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple walls and to assist the people in their plight; but, he desperately needed the support of a prophet, namely MALACHI, to assist him in this time of general crises!

E) THE PURPOSE OF MALACHI'S BOOK -

1. It is designed to set forth before Israel a picture of her ingratitude in the manner in which she was living as a nation
2. The Jews had robbed God not only in tithes and offering, but they had withheld from Him their loyalty and their love. If the people gave to God what rightfully belonged to Him, abundant blessings should follow...
3. It suggests that God's acceptance of human offerings and service is conditioned upon the sincerity and purity of the life of those who make them
4. Its intent is to encourage true repentance, zeal and enthusiasm for God in the hearts of the Jewish people
5. It seeks to restore an understanding of the value of serving the Lord faithfully
6. Coming as the last book of the Old Testament (*in the sense that O.T. seen as the Story of Israel from 2000 – 400 B.C.E.*), it reveals what little progress – *if any* – Israel had made since the nation was born 1500 years earlier.
7. MALACHI connects the O.T. with the N.T. in its prophecies of John the Baptist and Christ

F) STYLE OF WRITING –

1. Malachi is often referred to as the "**Hebrew Socrates.**"
 - a) His literary form was that of the scribes; putting and answering questions
 - b) This form shows us that the world in which Malachi lived and worked was no longer patient of prophetic preachers; he has to have recourse to argument.
2. Called the "**DIDACTIC-DIALECTIC**" Form;
 - a) This method became the universal style of teaching in Jewish schools and synagogues; it is still used in some quarters today
 - b) The method explained:
 - an assertion or charge is made by God
 - a fancied objection is raised by the hearers of that message
 - a refutation and defense of the objection is presented by the speaker
 - c) 7 distinct examples of this method will be found in our study of Malachi

G) THE FIRST OF MALACHI'S MULTIPLE MESSAGES –

1. An affirmation of God's Love for Israel and His specific choice of them to be His People (1:1-5)

¹ *A pronouncement. The LORD's word to Israel through Malachi.*

² *I have loved you, says the LORD;
but you say, "How have you loved us?"*

*Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother?
says the LORD.*

I loved Jacob,

³ *but I rejected Esau.*

*I turned Esau's mountains into desolation,
his inheritance into a wilderness for jackals.*

⁴ *Edom may say, "We are beaten down, but we will rebuild the ruins";
but the LORD of heavenly forces proclaims:
They may build, but I will tear them down.*

*They will call themselves a wicked territory,
the people against whom the LORD rages forever.*

⁵ *Your eyes will see it and you will say,
"May the LORD be great beyond the borders of Israel." Common English Bible (CEB)*

2. This passage was referenced by the Apostle Paul: (cf. Romans 9 - ¹³ *As it is written, I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau.*) For the complete stories about Jacob and Esau, I suggest that you read Genesis 25-27 and Genesis 32-36; Deuteronomy 2:4-29.

H. FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION –

1. Malachi's work is often described as a "burden." Why is that word significant?
2. What should be our role with those who endure various burdens, struggles, sins, and trials? (consider Paul's writing in Galatians 6:1-2)
3. Why did God love Jacob (1:2)?
4. Why did God hate Esau (1:3)?
5. If God intended to save all of humankind, blessing all of humanity, why was He so harsh to Esau and gracious to Jacob?
6. Those who are "God's elect" clearly have great responsibility. Does God hold us to a higher standard? If so, why?
7. How can seeing the love of God in any situation change our outlook?

I. YOUR CHALLENGE - Prior to our next session, read the Book of Malachi in its entirety. Then, see if you can identify the other 6 examples of the "DIDACTIC-DIALECTIC" Form recorded therein.