

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021**  
**SERMON: INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI**  
**TEXT: MALACHI 1:1**

Today we are going to begin looking at the message of a book that, I believe, many have skipped over, ignored, or decided that the message is just too difficult to understand. That is the book of Malachi, the last book of our Old Testament. It is a relatively short book (55 verses divided up into 4 chapters). I encourage you to read and re-read Malachi to get a better understanding of the content. It shouldn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes to read the entire book. Our scripture lesson today is very short, and it might surprise you, but it is Malachi 1:1:

**This is the message that the LORD gave to Israel through the prophet Malachi.**

My goal today is to provide you with background and context for the book. I want to cover the "who, what, when, where, and whys" of the book so that, together, we can find out what God wants us to know and put into practice in our lives. Remember that Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 that:

***<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.***

The scripture that Paul would be talking about is what we know as the Old Testament. The 39 books that make up the Old Testament are the same 39 books that Jesus used. This is important to know. Unfortunately many people skip over huge sections of the Old Testament because they don't believe it is relevant. I often hear people say, "I'm a New Testament Christian" meaning that they tend to only read the New and skip the Old. This is a lack of understanding as to the incredibly important and relevant teaching that is foundational to our lives as Christians today.

For grades 5 & 6, I attended a small Baptist Christian school in Nova Scotia. During that time, we were taught how to remember the types of books in the Old Testament and I still remember it today. 5-12-5-5-12! 5 book of 'Law,' 12 books of 'History,' 5 books of 'Poetry,' 5 Major prophets, 12 Minor prophets. Malachi fall into the category of the 12 minor prophets and is, in actuality, the last book of our English Old Testament. I call it the "English" bible because the Hebrew version is divided up differently than what we have. Instead of having 39 books, the Hebrew bible has 24. Before we get too worked up over this, the reason there seems to be less is that they divide up the books in a different fashion. Take for instance 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, we consider it two books, the Hebrew bible considers it one (as with the other '1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>' books). Ezra-Nehemiah are considered one book as are all twelve of the Minor Prophets and fall a bit more than half-way through the Hebrew bible.

Why are some prophets considered major and some considered minor? It has nothing to do with importance. It is because these books are quite a bit shorter in length than the Major Prophet, ranging from 1 to 14 chapters (Obadiah is the shortest. One chapter with 21 verses).

### **WHEN and WHO?**

Those scholars who have intensely studied Malachi would tell us that it is rightly positioned at the end of the Old Testament. A quick history lesson to remind us of what has happened with people of God.

The "Children of Israel" (the descendants of Jacob known as Israel) had become a great nation and were enslaved by the Pharaohs of Egypt. God raised Moses up to take on Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery to a "promised land." After all of the ups and downs of the wilderness wandering, Joshua finally lead the people into the land God had promised them. After they "took" the land for themselves the people eventually divided the land by tribes and settled it. Over time and during one of the times of disobedience, the people demanded that God give them a king to rule over them. The Israelites were never meant to have any king other than God, but God gave into the demand and Saul became the first king of Israel.

As many of you remember your Bible stories, we are introduced to a young shepherd boy who would one day become the greatest king of Israel – David, the son of Jesse, from Bethlehem. It didn't take many years for the Israelites to reach the pinnacle of their success with David as king. After he died, his son, Solomon, became king and the nation progressed, but the relationship between God and his people began to nosedive. After several kings, a civil war broke out and the Davidic kingdom of Israel divided into two separate kingdoms. The northern kingdom was called "Israel" with the capital being Shechem and then finally Samaria. The southern kingdom was known as "Judah" with the capital being Jerusalem. Although both kingdoms drew further and further away from God and began worshipping the false gods of the day, Israel and her kings were considered far eviler than that of Judah. Judah had evil kings, but there were some bright spots within the kings that saw Judah repent and turn back to God. As a punishment for their rebellion, Israel is taken into captivity by the Assyrian empire. The southern kingdom of Judah is finally punished for their rebellion against God about 200 years after the northern kingdom. They are taken into captivity by the Babylonian empire under the command of Nebuchadnezzar. These are the stories we know from the book of Daniel.

70 years later, God allows the people of Judah to return to their capital of Jerusalem. Israel, the northern kingdom, is never officially allowed to return. This remnant is not only people from Judah, but there is also those from the northern kingdom of Israel. They all begin to settle Jerusalem and the surrounding area, and it is during this time that the nation is known by their historic identity of "Israel." Malachi's message is to this group of people who were once known as "Judah" but now have taken back the name "Israel."

Now back to our scripture lesson:

**This is the message that the LORD gave to Israel through the prophet Malachi. (Nlt).**

Some of your translations may read like this:

**AN ORACLE: the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.**

The King James reads this way:

## **The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.**

Why is the opening verse of Malachi so important! It is important because it gives us the foundational information that we need to know when reading this book! The first line tells us what it is, whom it is from, and whom it is to.

### **GENRE**

It is very important to understand what the “genre” or type of literature the Book of Malachi is. Is it poetry, is it history, is it philosophy, is it prophetic and if so...what type of prophecy? Knowing the genre helps us read and discern the content more clearly.

Right from the start the genre is stated. Malachi is considered an “oracle.” This fact alone is enough to have a reader skip over the book. Why? When was the last time you read an oracle? It isn’t part of our culture so many do not know what an oracle is.

The term “oracle” is used a fair number of times in scripture, especially in the Prophets. The books of Nahum and Habakkuk are called oracles. The Hebrew term translated as “oracle” can be translated as a “burden or load.” This is fitting as many of the oracles found in the Old Testament are pronouncements and warnings of what would happen should the people of God continue to rebel against him. Not only is the oracle a burden on the people, but I think it is even more so a burden and a load on God. God, in his great depth of love for us, wants the best for us. That “best” is when we show our love to Him through our obedience to His commands and counsel. What a burden of heartbreak God must endure when we refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord of our lives. As a parent, it breaks my heart to see my children needlessly flounder and struggle. I do all I can to protect, to guide, to counsel, but in the end it is the individual who must decide to obey or rebel.

Israel is picking up the pieces of their disobedience. They had been warned to obey God but chose to worship false gods and practice injustice. In the end the result was a loss of their homeland and years of captivity by Babylon and Persia. Rather than learn from their history, it seems that the old rebelliousness is rearing its ugly head and God must once more confront His children through this oracle.

## **WHO IS THE MESSENGER?**

The easiest answer is Malachi and, apart from his name which literally means “messenger of God,” we do not know anything about him. Much like Moses, Malachi has been designated by God as the carrier of a divine message to God’s people. God has granted him the authority of this role as we are told that the message was delivered “through Malachi.” As far as we know, Malachi will become the last prophet the people will hear from before God seems to go silent. After the message of Malachi and the end of the Old Testament, the nation will enter 400 years of silence also known as the intertestamental period. It is a time of great growth and development in this part of the world. The Persian empire will fall to the Greek Empire (ruled by Alexander the Great and others). The Greek empire will fall to the Roman empire. In Israel, the people will turn back to monotheism, the worship of one God and it is during this time that their worship will develop into “Judaism” proper. The Jewish religion will become organized and we will see the appearance of the Pharisees and Sadducees and the development of the many rules and regulations. It is during this time that the people will once again be seeking the promised Messiah. This is the era of the great philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates and their influence on how people think and what they believe. Through all this there is no prophetic voice that had been so regular in the past. It isn’t until a man walks out of the wilderness and starts to preach the need for repentance because the Kingdom of God is at hand. After 400 years of silence, it is no wonder that people flocked to the last of the Old Testament prophets...John the Baptist.

## **THE SENDER**

The opening sentence of Malachi tells us plainly that this is an “oracle of the LORD.” Once again we must not overlook the seemingly insignificant. It wasn’t

sent merely by God or by Jehovah or by Adonai (all names for God) but it is an oracle from the **LORD**. It is significant that the name for God is in all capital letters. Look through your bibles and see how many times you find this. Why is this significant? It is significant because when the translators were doing their work they choose "LORD" to represent a specific name of God. That name is "Yahweh" and it is considered the proper name for God given to Moses at the burning bush. Moses is tasked with going before Pharaoh and wants to know the name of the one sending him when asked. God tells Moses to state that "I AM" sent him. The Hebrew term for "I AM" is "Yahweh" and it is considered the holy name of God...so holy that you don't pronounce it. It is the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and is the God of relationship and promise. When a Jewish person hears this name, it fills in all the gaps and you know exactly whom you are speaking about. Next week we will talk more about the significance of the one who sent the message and why it matters when you are trying to understand the message.

The message is not man-made. The message is divine in its authority and power. Malachi has no authority, he is only the means to the end. God is the author of this oracle, this burden, and the people must take note of it and take it seriously.

## **FOR TODAY**

Perhaps you find yourself thinking, "This is great, but why do I need to know it?" Over the years, as I have preached this style of sermon, every now and then a parishioner would come to me and ask me why I don't preach "regular" sermons. After I inwardly chuckle to myself and wonder what a 'regular' sermon is, I respond that I believe I could have no higher calling than to help others understand scripture more fully. My heart breaks when I see the lack of knowledge of what God is teaching us through the written word. It is used incorrectly by pastor and layperson alike. I'll be watching a tv show or movie and someone will say, "the bible says..." and I start yelling at the screen saying "NO it doesn't..." Sadly pastors can be just as bad at picking single verses out of the Bible and using them out of their context in order to make a point.

It is important to know how to understand scripture. Again Paul admonishes Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 to:

**<sup>15</sup> Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.**

So much damage has been done by people who misuse scripture. Every Christian has a responsibility to know how to properly use Scripture, and that skill will only come from diligent and regular study. This allows the Church of Jesus Christ to stand boldly when false prophets show up the likes of Jim Jones and David Koresh. The world is seeking for truth. The world is seeking after their Creator. May we be diligent in understanding our beliefs so we may play our part in increasing the Kingdom of God.

May God entrust us with his message for a lost and seeking world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we boldly stand and proclaim “This is what the Lord says...”

Let’s pray...