

MALACHI

(“My Messenger”)

Christian Formation
The Post-Exilic Period
10 December 2017

What Do You *Already* Know About Malachi?

Historical Context

- No chronological markers as w/ Haggai & Zechariah (see my notes online)
- Content clearly puts it in the time of Ezra/Nehemiah for he is dealing w/ similar sins:
 - Withholding the tithe (Mal 3.8 – 10; Neh 13.10 – 14)
 - Corrupt priests (Mal 1.6 – 2.9; Neh 13.1 – 9)
 - Social injustice (Mal 3.5; Neh 5.1 – 13)
 - And possibly mixed marriages (Mal 2.11 – 15; Ezra 9 – 10; Neh 13.23 – 27, although the Malachi passage here may refer to idolatry in a mixed-marriage metaphor.)

Sins Not Mentioned by Malachi

- Usury
- Profaning the temple by allowing unbelievers to dwell in it
- Violation of the Sabbath
- Malachi is concerned about the kind of sacrifices brought to the temple, illegitimate divorce, and general apathy towards sacrifices at the temple.

Fast Outline of Malachi

- Malachi is concerned about general apathy towards the temple, some brought on by corrupt priests, and the resulting crummy sacrifices offered to God.
- Part of the problem is that the people feel they have “done their part” but God has not shown any spectacular action on his part. Judah is still small, still surrounded by enemies, and the “great works of God” are absent. Hence the apathy and the cynicism.

The Cure?

- Get in touch w/ the Living God!
- How?
 - God does not change (Mal 3.6). The covenant still obtains, and God still invites people to return to him (3.7)
 - God never forgets those who respond to his covenant invitation.
 - And eschatological judgement is coming, so straighten up in light of this (4.1 – 6)

Literary Form

Rhetorical questions (or disputes) on the part of the Lord to/from his people jump out as a literary pattern in Malachi. The questions are:

1. Does God still love the Jacob? (1.2 – 5) (I.e., is the covenant still in play?)
2. If God is “father” and “master,” why are the people presenting such crummy sacrifices? (1.6 – 14)
3. If God is creator and father, then why are his children abusing one another? (2.10 – 12)
4. Why is God refusing to honor the sacrifices? (2.13 – 16)
5. How have the people wearied the Lord with their words? (2.17; 3.13 – 15)
6. Will a man rob God? (3.8, 9)
7. Why do the wicked prosper? Does God care? (3.13 – 15)

The Response?

- The Lord answers these questions in the “here and now,” but final resolution to these problems—especially the problem of evil—awaits until “that day (chapter 4).”

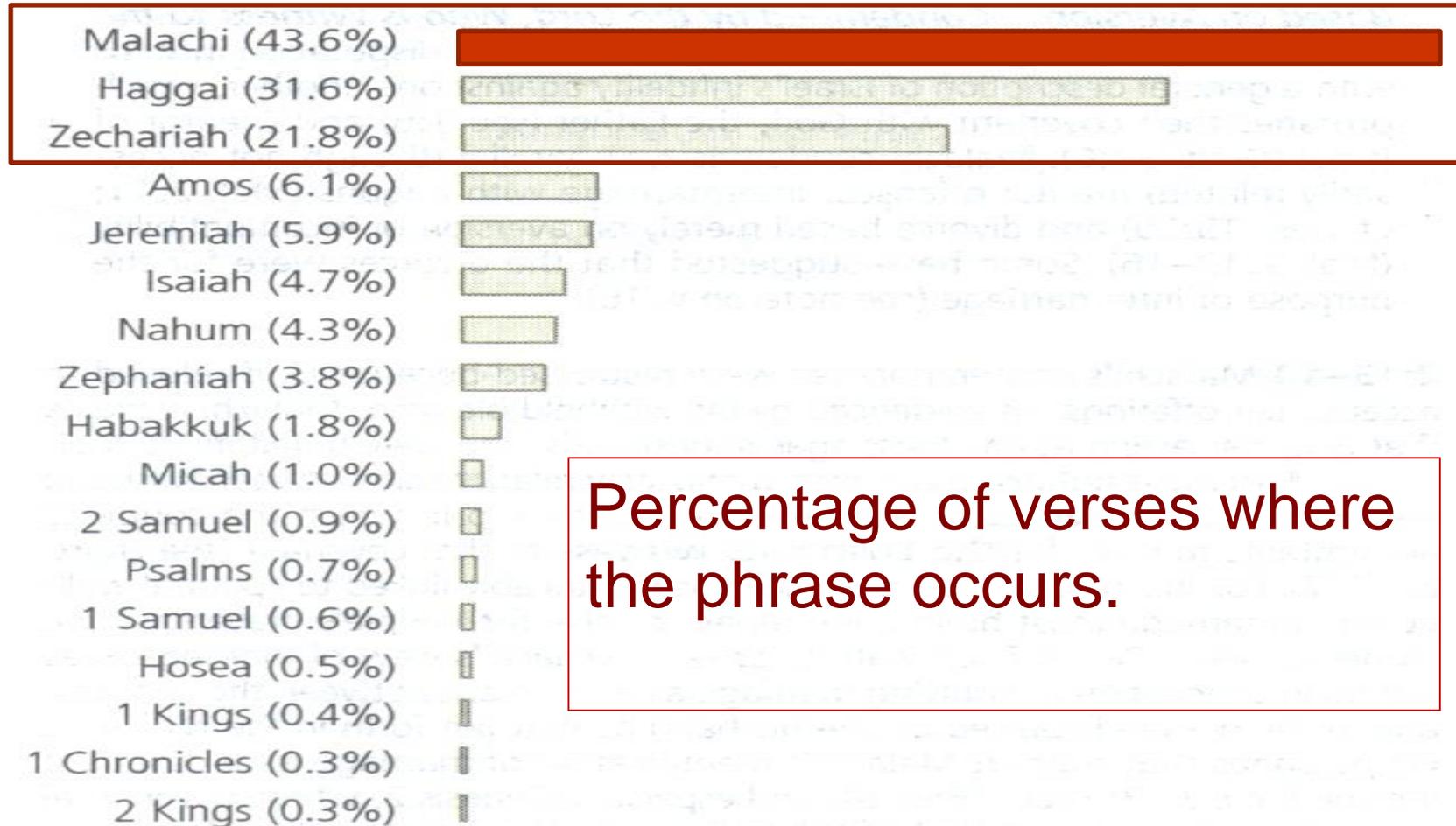
Does God Still Love Jacob (1.2 – 5)

- ²“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob; ³ but I have hated Esau.
- Yikes! God hates? Where is the God of love? (Ps 5.5; 11.5)
- What does it mean he hates Esau? (Gen 25.23, 27.27 – 29; 28.13 – 17; 35.9 – 15; Dt 7.6 – 11)
- How does Paul use the difference between Jacob and Esau in his discussion of election? (Gal 3.8; Rom 11.25 – 32)

Crummy Sacrifices (1.6 – 14)

- ⁶ “If I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?”
- In what sense is Malachi using the term “father?” (Cf. Ex 4.22, 23)
- Response from the priests: “How have we despised Your name?” (vs. 6) “How have we defiled You?” (vs. 7) *Are the priests this obtuse?*
- What’s the answer?
- What does this have to say about the attitude of the priests, especially if they wouldn’t dare present such offerings to their governor.

Use of the Phrase “Lord of Hosts”



Percentage of verses where the phrase occurs.

What does the phrase “Lord of Hosts” mean?

Can you think of a reason why the phrase is used so much after the return?

Cheating the Lord w/ crummy sacrifices (11 – 14)

- In spite of being God’s special people, they show disdain for the Lord by offering unacceptable animals for sacrifices—animals they wouldn’t dare present to a human magistrate let alone to the “Lord of Hosts.”
- Concomitantly, those sacrificing “cheat” the Lord by vowing acceptable animal and then pull a “bait and switch” with second (and third) rate sacrifices.
- This is especially reprehensible in light of vs. 11 where the Gentiles will offer incense and pure offerings to the Lord Almighty, for they—unlike the Jews of the time—will recognize the Lord’s majesty and respond accordingly.

The Lord's Response?

- Shutter the windows!! Bar the doors!! Better not to have a temple than offer meaningless sacrifices by contemptuous people! (vs. 10)

Priests BEWARE!!

- 2.1 – 3: The priests are lackadaisical and not doing their job of instructing the people (Part of the duty of priests.) God will “rub their face in it” since they are already defiled.
- 4 – 7: Mention of Levi, but probably a patronym, for Levi was not all that noble (Gen 29 & 49). Probably referring to Phinehas (Num 25.10 – 13).
- 8 – 9: Priests will be despised for not doing their jobs. (Like the view of lawyers today?)

The “Children” Abusing One Another (2.10 – 12)

- Vs. 10: “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?”
- Some believe “father” refers to Abraham or to Jacob since Malachi mentions the latter frequently (1.2; 2.12; 3.6)
- Does it matter in terms of the teaching?
- Could Malachi be promoting **universalism** here? After all, isn't *all* humanity in God's image? Didn't God create all of us?

Why is God refusing to honor the sacrifices?

(2.13 – 16)

- Vs. 13: The people may weep and wail that God is not accepting their sacrifices, but there is good reason.
- First, the sacrifices are inferior, as noted above.
- 14 – 15: Second, husbands have broken their marriage vow—for no good reason, it appears—thus breaking the covenant between husband and wife and negating the “one flesh” concept of marriage that goes all the way back to creation. (vs. 15 is very difficult to translate. See notes.)
- Note that God seeks “godly offspring” from a marriage based on the premises of the covenantal relationship between husband and wife as first instituted in Eden.

God Hates Divorce (vs. 16)

- “I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong [or violence],” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”
- Is Malachi responding to an impetuous act by Ezra, or was Ezra countermanding the instruction of Malachi?
- As for whether divorce is ever justified, see notes.

But I Must Add This

- 1 Pet 3.7: “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”
- A godly relationship w/ one’s spouse obtains today!

People Wearied the Lord With Their Words

(2.17; 3.13 – 15)

- Vs. 17: You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied Him?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?” (Cf. 3.13 – 15 where the same question arises.)
- Did disillusionment set in after the rebuilding of the temple, for no obvious supernatural event accompanied the return of the Lord to Jerusalem. The Jews have done their part, but God failed to fill his promises (cf. Zech 8.3). The delays were an excuse for cynicism and shoddy temple worship.

Why the Cynicism?

- The people are under the illusion that God has turned justice upside down. Apparently, evil deeds are not quickly punished, so the people think God doesn't care. He does, of course, but the ultimate judgment of evil will come in the future (i.e., eschatologically, cf. next chapter). Today, à la Habakkuk, remain faithful to God's word.
- The Lord's return will answer the question "Where is the God of justice."
- What about us? How do we keep from becoming cynical, for how many "great acts of God" do we witness?

The Messenger

- 3.1: “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.
- The Lord will send his messenger who will enter his temple (cf. Is 40.3), but who will be able to stand it, for at this time real justice will emerge. He will refine and purify the Levites (priests), and the inhabitants will offer proper sacrifices that are acceptable to the Lord as they were in the past.

But Judgment Comes First (vs. 5)

- Notice the objects of judgment: sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, those that defraud laborers, oppressors of widows and the fatherless, abusers of aliens out of justice, and ultimately those that do not fear the Lord.
- Are these the sins that people saw and wondered why God was not taking care of them? “Well, just wait!” says the Lord.

Who Is the Messenger?

- Of course, we see in the NT that the “Messenger” was John the Baptist (Mt 11.10; Mk 1.2), the new Elijah (Mal 4.5; Mt 17.10, 13; Mk 9.11 – 13; Lk 1.17; Jn 1.19 – 21).

Will a man rob God? (3.8, 9)

- ⁸ Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!
- One wonders if the questions asked of God by the people arise from obtuseness on the part of the people, or is it smarminess on their part? Either way, it’s bad!
- Note that the tithe was mandated in the Mosaic Law as part of the covenant obligation: Lev 27.30 – 32; Num 18.21 – 32; Dt 12.5 – 19; 14.22 – 28; 26.12.

The Lord's Challenge (3.10 – 13)

- Do what I ask, and you'll see blessings you will not believe!
- Has the challenge changed in NT times? (cf. 2 Cor 9.6 – 11)
- Note that the concept of supplying the physical needs of those who supply our spiritual needs applies to the church. (Cf. 1 Cor 8.11 – 14; Rom 15.27; Gal 6.6)

Why Do the Wicked Prosper? Does God Care?

(3.13 – 15)

- In context, the people see the arrogant and the evil doers prosper, and they believe that God is not all that interested, so why “knock ourselves out” keeping the Torah if nothing comes of it? I.e., God’s reciprocity for obedience, in their minds, has become a legal fiction.
- Of course, this theodicy has been around as long as humans have believed in the God of the Bible.

The Response (Vss. 17 – 18)

- Some of the people “get it” and repent, and the Lord will make them part of his “treasured possession,” sparing them as a father spares his son.
- Note the image of writing the names of the righteous on a scroll, or in a “book of life,” appears numerous times in the Bible (Ex 32.32, 33; Ps 69.28; Dan 12.11; Lk 10.20; Phil 4.3; Rev 3.5; 13.8; 20.12, 15; 21.27; 22.19).
- The Lord emphasizes again that true justice is eschatological. The time will come when the people will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those that serve God and those who don't.

Back to the Problem of Evil (4.1 – 3)

[Heb 3.19 – 21]

- “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the Lord of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”
- This is a continuation of 3.1 – 5. The Lord will destroy the wicked w/ fire. They will disappear “root and branch,” like stubble in a fire. (Think of the devastation in the recent CA fires!)
- All this will happen “in the/that day,” and expression signifying the wrapping up of history, or eschatological end of the world as we know it (Cf. Zeph 1.8, 15 – 16; and esp. Zech 14.7).

But for Those That Honor God...

- The “Sun of Righteousness” will come w/ “healing in its wings” (Shades of “Hark the Herald, Angels Sing”)*. Note the use of this figure by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist: “Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the **Sunrise from on high will visit us.**” Note the similar figure in Is 9.2: “**The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.**”
- Apparently, the righteous will have a part in the judgment, for they will “trample down the wicked” (4.3), and they will be “ashes under their feet.” (If this sounds vengeful, take a look at Rev 18.6.)
- ***Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace Hail the Son of Righteousness, Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings**

Remember the Law of Moses

Watch Out for the Coming of Elijah

- 4.4 – 6 [Heb 3.22 – 24]: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

The Coming of Elijah

- Who is “Elijah to come?” Same as “The Messenger?”
- Note that he is to restore the hearts of the parents to their children and vice-versa before the dreadful day of the Lord.
- John the Baptist, called Elijah by Jesus (see above), did not come “before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that an anti-type of John will appear before the Second Coming. Perhaps one of the “witnesses” of Rev 11.6? After all, one of the witnesses of Rev 11.6 has the power to shut up the sky so it does not rain. What prophet of the OT period was able to do that?

The Last Word Is...

“CURSE!”

- The word can mean complete destruction, as w/ the cities the Lord told Joshua to destroy coming into the land of Canaan.
- What is the counterpart at the end of Revelation?

Conclusions

- I've said enough. This part is up to you.
- Would your life be any different if Malachi were not in the canon? Why or why not?
- Can you ask the same question for any book in the Bible?
- If you had to keep ONE book of the Bible, which one would it be?