

18. MALACHI

460 BC

Malachi is the last prophet of the OT. The next prophet, John the Baptist, was the last prophet under the old covenant. Between these two prophets, there were 485 years of silence. Where is the Messiah? When will the prophecies be fulfilled? Malachi prophecies about the messenger who would precede the Messiah before that great and awesome day of the Lord.

The Lord's messenger precedes the Messiah (Mal 3:1-4)

Listen! I will send my messenger to prepare the way for me, and suddenly, the Lord you seek will come to his temple. Listen! The messenger of my covenant with you, in whom you delight, is coming (Mal 3:1).

The Lord whom Israel seeks, the Messenger of the Covenant, is the Messiah, and the messenger is John the Baptist.

The word for messenger in Hebrew and Greek can also mean angel. So the Messenger of the Covenant may be interpreted as the Angel of the Lord who in ancient times appeared to people in human form and spoke to them as the Lord himself. As there is no evidence of the Father and the Holy Spirit appearing to people on Earth like this, it can be assumed that the appearances of the Angel of the Lord are appearances of God the Son.

The messenger who was sent was, according to Jesus, the prophet, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for him (Mt 11:10). He preached repentance and pointed people to Jesus, whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. The messenger is spoken of again by Malachi, when the Lord says, "Listen, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord comes" (Mal 4:5) But this is a different occasion.

Jesus went to the temple each year during his ministry, but hardly suddenly. These verses have two fulfillments relating to the two comings of Jesus. The first and second comings of Christ are here brought together.

“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap” (Mal 3:2). This relates to his second coming. Only the saints will stand tall on that day, those who trust in Jesus and have been made righteous by his shed blood. When the Messiah returns, one purpose is to come in judgment as a refiner and to purify the Levites and reinstate them in the temple worship, so that appropriate offerings can be made to God. Jeremiah also prophesied about the role of the Levites in the Messianic era: “For this is what the Lord says: David’s household will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel, and the Levitical priests will ever fail to have a man to stand before me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present daily sacrifices (Jer 33:17-18). He added that the fulfillment of this prophecy is just as sure as the continuance of day and night (Jer 33:20-22).

The Lord’s treasured possession (Mal 3:16-18)

The Lord knows those who are his, their names are written in his Book of Life, and he will save them. As in the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Lord will treat the righteous differently from the wicked. The phrase ‘treasured possession’ hearkens back to Exodus 19:5-6, where God told Israel that if they obeyed him, they would be his treasured possession among all peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Peter, likewise, views the Church as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s treasured possession (1 Pet 2:9). These verses are specifically about those who fear the Lord, not the whole nation of Israel. It is the righteous, those names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, who will be resurrected and constitute the monarchy in the Messianic kingdom.

The Great Day of the Lord (Mal 4:1-6)

Listen! The day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the proud and wicked will be like stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. No root or branch will be left of them.

The righteous will tread down the wicked as ashes under their feet. This is the judgment on the wicked on the Day of the Lord when Jesus returns. A Psalmist describes this same event:

Clouds and thick darkness surround him,
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
Fire goes before him and consumes his foes who surround him.
His lightning lights up the world,
And when the Earth sees it, it trembles.
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
before the Lord of all the Earth (Ps 97:2-5).

When Jesus returns, we should think of the glory of the Lord as seen by Ezekiel in his visions.

And I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the East.
His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and his glory lit up the land (Ezek 43:2).

His coming will be very bright and noisy as Isaiah also said:

Look, the Lord is coming with fire and his chariots are like a whirlwind. He will descend on them with fury and rebuke them with flames of fire. For the Lord will judgment all nations with fire and sword, and many will be those slain by the Lord (Isa 66:15-16).

Paul expressed it this way:

When the Lord Jesus descends from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels, he will punish those who don't know God and do not accept the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess 1:7-8).

Peter builds on these prophecies, saying:

The Day of the Lord will come like a thief. At that time, the heavens will disappear with a roar; things will be burnt and destroyed, and the Earth and everything on it will be stripped bare (2 Pet 3:10).

In case we think it is the end of the world, he adds:

But God has promised a new heaven and a new Earth (Isa 65:17-25) that we are looking forward to, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13).

As for you who revere my name, the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in his rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample the wicked and they will be ashes under your feet on the day when I act (Mal 4:2-3).

Half the English translations personalize the sun, others leave it impersonal, but it is hard to see the meaning of a righteous sun or the sun as righteousness. The Sun of Righteousness may be interpreted as the Messiah whose arrival signals the dawning of a new era. He will dispel the gloom and destruction of the great tribulation and usher in a new era of righteousness. He is like the sun which has health and healing in its rays. The righteous, those who fear his name, will be so happy and excited at the coming of the Lord that they will jump around like young calves. The Lord is talking here to Israel who will be victorious over their enemies at the Lord's coming. However, the excitement of that event will also be experienced by the resurrected and raptured saints as they rise to meet the Lord in the air.

The saints will rule in the Messianic kingdom. They will have authority over the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. They will trample down the wicked as ashes under their feet. The righteous will at last have dominance and the wicked will be killed or at least humbled before them. The righteous are told to remember the commandments that Moses received on Mt Sinai because they are to rule with justice and righteousness.

The final verse of the OT is quoted by the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, regarding his son John the Baptist (Luke 1:14-16) saying that John would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus confirmed that (Mt 11:14) but he also leaves open a second coming of Elijah when he says: To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things (Mark 9:12). His ministry is seen as a reconciliation between the fathers (the godly patriarchs) and the children.

The context of the prophecy is "before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord" which is not the time of Jesus' birth, or John the Baptist's ministry, but rather the return of the Messiah in judgment. Malachi saw a prophet like Elijah in the distance, preceding the ministry of Jesus and calling Israel to repentance; that was John the Baptist. Then he sees Elijah again before the Day of the Lord and this time it is not John the Baptist.

Malachi mentions Moses and Elijah in these final verses of his prophecy and we meet them again at the transfiguration (Lk 9:31) where they speak with Jesus about his death, resurrection, and ascension. The Lord's two unnamed witnesses of Revelation 11, who preach for the last 3 1/2 years before the Lord's return, resemble Moses and Elijah since Elijah brought drought for 3 1/2 years (Jas 5:17) and called down fire on people, while Moses called down plagues on people and turned water into blood (Rev 11:5-6). For the whole nation of Israel to be converted to Jesus, it is appropriate that the two witnesses should be strong representatives of the Law and the Prophets.

Their preaching will reconcile the godless Jewish nation of the last days and bring them back to the faith of their godly Jewish ancestors. The resurrection and ascension of the witnesses and the great earthquake that follows killing seven thousand people in Jerusalem will lead the survivors to give glory to the God of heaven. The ungodly Gentiles at this time do not repent or give glory to God; they can only curse him (Rev 16:9, 11, 21), so the inhabitants of Jerusalem giving glory to God are a sign of Israel's imminent conversion when the Messiah arrives and pours out his Spirit upon them (Zech 12:10).

The context here fits the Messiah's coming in judgment. Israel is warned that if they don't repent, their land will be marked for destruction.