

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets Lest We Forget? (Malachi)

Lesson #13 for June 29, 2013

Scriptures: Malachi 1-4; Leviticus 1:1-3; Ephesians 5:21-33; Exodus 32:32.

1. The name *Mal'aki* means "my messenger." However, it could be a contraction of *Mal'akiyah* meaning "messenger of Yahweh." This name is not found anywhere else in the Old Testament. It could be a title and not a name. Who else do Seventh-day Adventists refer to as a "messenger of the Lord"? The book of Malachi uses the rhetorical form of dialectic reasoning which was popular in his day. That method was used very effectively by Socrates who lived at about the same time.
2. Malachi was almost certainly the last book of the Old Testament to be written. Malachi 1:7,8 and 3:10 suggest that it was written after the rebuilding of the temple when Judea was ruled by a governor appointed by the King of Persia. Many of the sins suggested by Malachi were rampant in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 13:23-31; Ezra 9,10) This leads scholars to date the book of Malachi somewhere around 425 B.C., perhaps during the second time Nehemiah ruled.
3. As we know, historically, the prophetic voice felt silent for the next 400+ years. Did the attitudes of the people expressed in the book of Malachi have anything to do with that silence? Why didn't God just give up on the Jewish people at that point?
4. The core message in the book of Malachi is: God is prepared to give us many blessings; but, He expects us to respond in appropriate ways to His blessings. God's blessings come with responsibilities. God requires more than just pretentious piety which He specifically states is nauseating to Him and it causes Him to vomit. (Revelation 3:16; *Special Testimonies, Series B, #2*, p. 20.1) Does this message from Malachi and also from John when speaking to the Laodicean church have any application to the Seventh-day Adventist Church of today?
5. The general outline of the book of Malachi includes eight different times when God addressed the people and their leaders, pointing out specific transgressions. (Malachi 1:2, 6,7,8,10-13; 2:13,14,17; 3:7,8,13,14)

Look at all of the questions that people asked in the book of Malachi and think about why the people asked these questions. Then explain the answers that God gave to each question or to some of them. Here are the people's eight questions, prefaced by God's statement, "you ask":

1. " " "How have you loved us?" " " (*Mal. 1:2, NIV*).
2. " " "How have we shown contempt for your name?" " " (*Mal. 1:6, NIV*).
3. " " "How have we defiled you?" " " (*Mal. 1:7, NIV*).
4. Why do You not pay attention to our offerings and accept them with pleasure from our hands? (*Mal. 2:13, 14*).
5. " " "How have we wearied him? . . . Where is the God of justice?" " " (*Mal. 2:17, NIV*).
6. " " "How are we to return" " " to You? (*Mal. 3:7, NIV*).
7. " " "How do we rob you?" " " (*Mal. 3:8, NIV*).
8. " " "What have we said against you?" " " (*Mal. 3:13, NIV*).

In what ways are these issues still relevant to us in our postmodern world? How are we grappling with similar questions? (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 160.)

In his *Message Bible*, Eugene Peterson says this about the book of Malachi:

Most of life is not lived in crisis—which is a good thing. Not many of us would be able to sustain a life of perpetual pain or loss or ecstasy or challenge. **But crisis has this to say for it: in time of crisis everything, absolutely everything, is important and significant. Life itself is on the line. No word is casual, no action marginal. And almost always, God and our relationship with God is on the front page.**

But during the humdrum times, when things are, as we tend to say, “normal,” our interest in God is crowded to the margins of our lives and we become preoccupied with ourselves. . . .

The prophecy of Malachi is made to order for just such conditions. Malachi creates a crisis at a time when we are unaware of crisis. He wakes us up to the crisis of God during the times when the only thing we are concerned with is us. He keeps us on our toes, listening for God, waiting in anticipation for God, ready to respond to God, who is always coming to us.

Malachi gets in the last word of Holy Scripture in the Old Testament. The **final sentences in his message to us evoke the gigantic figures of Moses and Elijah—Moses to keep us rooted in what God has done and said in the past, Elijah to keep us alert to what God will do in the days ahead. By leaving us in the company of mighty Moses and fiery Elijah, Malachi considerably reduces the danger of our trivializing matters of God and the soul.** (Introduction to Malachi - *The Message*)

6. How do we explain God’s statement in Malachi 1:1-3? It is very important to read these words in light of the entire history of the Israelites versus the Edomites throughout the Old Testament. This is not a statement about Jacob and Esau as individuals. For example, see Genesis 25:23; 36:1-9; Isaiah 34:5-17; 63:1-6; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Amos 1:11,12; and Obadiah 1-14. It should be very clear that the descendants of Esau were frequent rivals and enemies of the Israelites. But, how could a God of love say He hates them? Read Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26. What God is saying to us is that because of their attitudes and behaviors, He could not love the people of Edom as He loved the descendants of Israel. In other words, *hate* in this passage means to “love less.” This is a good example of why we need to have a “biblical vocabulary”!
7. Read Malachi 1:6-14. Why did God say, “Cursed be the cheat”? Can even a physician here on this earth heal a cheating patient who refuses to do anything the doctor tells him to do? Does God have to actively curse the “cheat”? Or, is he cursed as the natural result of his own behavior? Wasn’t God simply stating a universal truth? Cheats only destroy themselves by their behavior. They may temporarily “get away with” their cheating; but, sooner or later, the results will show. God does not have to place a curse on the one who is cheating; he simply reaps the results of his cheating. Acts 16:31 tells us that our salvation is based on trust or faith. Cheating directly destroys that trust. Do we really want to destroy the very basis for our salvation? Do we want to make all of God’s efforts on our behalf a waste? Do we want to destroy our faith? Consider Cain.
8. Read Malachi 2:1-9. Can you imagine a God of love rubbing anyone’s face in dung? (Malachi 2:3) Why would He do or say such a thing? The priests in Malachi’s day were promoting cheating. God had planned a wonderful life for the children of Israel. But, their leaders were teaching them to do wrong instead of right. How do you think God should feel about such behavior?
9. Read Malachi 2:10-16. If you review the history of the children of Israel, you will realize that the beginning of the downfall occurred with Solomon marrying a thousand wives. Even earlier, God had to take the children of Jacob out of Canaan into Egypt in order to prevent them from just marrying Canaanite women and melting into Canaanite society. Following the Babylonian captivity on two different occasions (see #2 above—Ezra and Nehemiah), God had to step in and forcefully try to prevent the children of Israel from marrying foreign wives. This kind of relationship promoted by the fertility cult religions of Baal and Ashtoreth had led to the Babylonian captivity. Is it any wonder that God said, “I hate divorce”? God realized that if they fell back into that despicable practice, Israel would very soon lose any identity as His chosen people. Consider some other comments about divorce in Scripture. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18)
10. It was God’s original intention for men to learn about God from their wives and for wives to learn about God from their husbands. Men tend to have characteristics of strength, determination, and energy, setting for themselves high standards. Women tend to be more caring, loving, and accepting of others. In a true Christian marriage, the two partners are to learn from each other the characteristics of the other. This kind of God’s ideal could never succeed with casual on and off marital affairs and certainly not by marriage to foreign women accustomed to fertility-cult religions.
11. Read Malachi 2:17-3:5. The children of Israel had come to believe that God was a distant being who

paid little attention to whatever they did. But, God reminded them that the day is coming when He will, in fact, appear as a Judge and as the Refiner against all who are doing wrong. Do any of us in our day tend to think that God does not see or hear or care about what we are doing?

12. Read Malachi 3:6. How could God say, "I am the Lord, and I do not change"? See 1 Samuel 2:30; 15:10,11,29,35; 26:19; and Genesis 6:6,7; Exodus 32:14; Numbers 23:19,20; Judges 2:18; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:14; etc. What are we supposed to do with such passages which are apparently in direct contradiction with each other? Some students of Scripture try to explain such apparent contradictions on God's part by suggesting it was the writer's lack of a full understanding of God! But, a careful look at the larger context of each of these passages should provide a more satisfactory answer. Was it God's idea to make Saul king in the first place? No! The people were the ones who were insisting on a king. God warned them, and Samuel warned them, but they still insisted. So, God allowed them to have a king. He helped them choose the kind of king that they were looking for. But, God knew from the beginning what the results of Saul's life would be. Wasn't God sorry even before Saul was made king that the people were not willing to allow God Himself to be their King? Biblical passages need to be read in the context of all of Scripture.
13. God was not sorry that He had made humans. (Genesis 6:6,7) He Himself said that He was very pleased with His work in making us. (Genesis 1:31) God knew in advance that the flood was coming. But, He was very sorry that it was necessary. His children were the ones that were perishing. God refuses to take away our freedom of choice even when He knows in advance it is going to have devastating consequences. Freedom is essential for love, and God would not exchange that for anything.
14. Read Malachi 3:8-12. What is the meaning and purpose of *tithe*? Why did God say that those who do not "pay up" are cheating Him? (Malachi 3:8-12)
15. The English word *tithe* is derived from the Old English words *teothe* or *teogotha* which mean one-tenth. The word is used to translate the Hebrew word *maaser* which means one-tenth. It usually is used to refer to the tenth portion of one's income whether from crops or salary or any other source that is returned to God as an acknowledgment that all we have and are belong to Him. Abraham paid a "tenth" to the King/Priest Melchizedek after God helped him rescue Lot and his associates. (See Genesis 14:20) Jacob promised to return one-tenth of his income if God would continue to bless him. (See Genesis 28:22)
16. Later, God instructed Moses and the children of Israel to set aside the tenth (tithe) as support for the tabernacle/temple and the descendants of Levi. (See Leviticus 27:30-33) Many religious organizations still suggest that a tenth should be set aside as support for the clergy.
17. In Malachi God went beyond just asking us to set aside the tithe. He does not even just command us to do it. In this passage, God actually suggests that we enter into a partnership with Him. He challenges us to test Him. Shouldn't anyone who is thinking clearly want God as a Partner?
18. Read Malachi 3:13-18, and compare Matthew 5:43-48. When God seems to treat all people equally whether they are doing good or bad, how does that make us feel about Him? Will the day finally come when He will clearly distinguish between those who are doing what is right and those who are doing wrong? How do you feel about God sending His blessings even on the wicked?
19. What is the scroll (book) of remembrance being discussed in Malachi 3:16? See Exodus 32:32; Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 4:3; 65:6; Daniel 7:9,10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Revelation 20:12,15. We do not know what kind of "books" God has in heaven. No doubt, His recording devices are much superior to anything of which we have ever heard. However, He does have an accurate record of everything that has ever happened on this earth.

The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. **That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.** Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ?

The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God.

The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come. Oh, we do not comprehend the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it. The gift of God in His beloved Son was the expression of an incomprehensible love. It was the utmost that God could do to preserve the honor of His law, and still save the transgressor. Why should man not study the theme of redemption? It is the greatest subject that can engage the human mind. If men would contemplate the love of Christ, displayed in the cross, their faith would be strengthened to appropriate the merits of His shed blood, and they would [1133] be cleansed and saved from sin. (*ST* Dec. 30, 1889 par. 4; *5BC* 1132.9,10; *OHC* 45.4; *TA* 205.3)

20. Read Malachi 4. What does this chapter tell us about the final destiny of the wicked and the righteous? (Compare Deuteronomy 30:19; John 3:16; John 5:27,28) Consider some other verses in the Bible that talk about the ultimate destiny of the wicked: Exodus 15:17; Isaiah 5:24; 40:24; 41:2; 47:14; 66:24; Joel 2:5; Obadiah 18; Nahum 1:10; 2 Peter 2:6.
21. These verses should make it very clear that the final destiny of the wicked is nothingness. There is no such thing as an eternally-burning hell unless you consider God's glory as the true fires of "hell." Remember that "The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked." (*Desire of Ages* 108.0)
22. What is the "Elijah message"? (Malachi 4:5,6) Will there be an Elijah message in our day? If so, what is it? And, who is to bear it? Just as John the Baptist brought a startling but very plain message to the children of Israel before the ministry of Jesus, God's true people are to bring a startling and plain message to the world just before His second coming. Revelation 19:10 can be read to suggest that just such a group will arise who are "inspired like the prophets" with a final message for the world.
23. Knowing what you know of the Old Testament (which the people even in Malachi's day had available), do you think you would be able to get the picture of God that Jesus came up with?
24. Would it be safer for God to save: 1) The "wicked" people of the Old Testament who secretly went off to the pagan fertility cult ceremonies and got drunk and naked with the pagan temple prostitutes, 2) The spiritually-proud Pharisees who had memorized Scripture but did not want to accept the idea that they might be misinterpreting it, or 3) The Laodiceans of our day who are described as feeling "rich and increased with goods [spiritually], and have need of nothing"? (See Revelation 3:17,18)
25. In the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28) and Ezra (Nehemiah 8) as well as at other times, there were great revivals and reformations among the people of Jerusalem and Judah when the Bible was "rediscovered" and read to the people. Of course, there were other times when they thought that they were better off worshiping the "queen of heaven" than Jehovah. (Jeremiah 7:18,19; 44:15-30) Can you name some up or down times for the church of Laodicea?
26. Why do you think there was such a response to the reading of the Bible at those revival times? How can we encourage revival and reformation in our day?

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