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## Malachi: Prophet of Fulfillment

Author(s): Ellis T. Rasmussen

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the prophet Malachi.



# MALACHI

## Prophet of Fulfillment

. . . Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord. . . .

— Malachi 3:7.

In those twelve words lies the theme of the message of Malachi, herald of the fulfillment of God's covenants with man. His book is the last of the Old Testament collection of prophetic books, and his prophecies anticipate the end and the cleansing of the wicked world. He is a spokesman for the Lord whose very name means "My Messenger."<sup>1</sup>

Malachi has always been reckoned by the Rabbis and the commentators as a prophet unto the Judeans who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. They had returned hopefully to Zion and had in the course of two decades built up Solomon's Temple, expecting full restoration of the glories of the former Kingdom of Judah, if not indeed the Messianic Kingdom foretold by the last prophecy of Haggai.<sup>2</sup>

That their hopes had not been realized during the Fifth century B.C. is a matter of history, and it is possible that parts of Malachi's book comprise prophecies for the discouraged Judeans of that time. That his hearers had drifted into negligent practices and cynical attitudes is evident from the prophet's bill of particulars against them. Do his admonitions and promises have pertinence and significance again in our day?

The first point that he makes is that the Lord has shown His love to His people, but He has also disapproved of things they have done. They who doubt His love are as wrong as they who defy His chastening. Even as a son should honor his father, and a servant his master, so should men honor the Lord; but by their very acts of "worship" the priests themselves had despised His name.

In response to the peevish question, "Wherein have we despised thy name?", the prophet lists four examples of attitudes and activities despicable to the Lord. For one thing, His people make the "table of the Lord" contemptible. In those days it was done by offering blemished, unacceptable sacrifice — and obviously with begrudging hearts. In our day it would be done in the mind and spirit of those who eat and drink, either thoughtlessly or indeed insincerely and perhaps actually unworthily, of the emblems of His great Sacrifice. It would be done by those who give grudgingly of their tithes, time, and talents.

Another example is a failing of duty by men holding the priesthood. The duty of the priest had been made clear by the Lord:

*My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid [i.e., in awe and reverence] before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.<sup>3</sup>*

But when the bearer of the priesthood power and responsibility will not hear, nor ". . . lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. . . ." (*Malachi 2:2.*) When they who bear this honor are "departed out of the way" and have "caused many to stumble," in that day or this, the covenant and the covenant-bearer are made contemptible.

<sup>1</sup> Like all Hebrew proper names, "Malachi" is translatable; it means literally "My Messenger" or, for that matter, "My Angel." There is no reason for arguing it was not a proper name, though

some have held this view.

<sup>2</sup> See *Haggai 2:18-23.*

<sup>3</sup> *Malachi 2:5-7.*

A third example of a bad attitude scored by the prophet is the failure of His people to appreciate and regard the significance of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. This evil is condemned by Malachi in one of the most poignant and pertinent passages to be found in the book:

*Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?<sup>4</sup>*

The covenant spoken of which was profaned would doubtless be the basic Abrahamic covenant and the basic Mosaic law of moral behavior. All followers of Abraham and partakers of his covenant with God had conferred upon them the responsibility to "bear this ministry and priesthood unto all nations," that through them all families of the earth should be blessed.<sup>5</sup>

The basic law given through Moses governing the behavior of the bearers of such covenanted responsibility is: ". . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself . . ." and ". . . the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself. . . ." <sup>6</sup> These covenants, said Malachi, had been profaned.

A fourth fault of his day and ours is the "putting away" of "the wife of thy youth" and dealing "treacherously" with her. The wife is ideally described by the prophet as "thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." The purpose of God in making the two as one is that He might from them bring forth "a godly seed." ". . . Therefore," said the Lord through the prophet, "take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth."<sup>7</sup> He concludes significantly, ". . . the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away."<sup>8</sup>

More specifically directed to us of the latter day is the prophet's herald of the coming of the messenger of the Lord to prepare the way for Him before He suddenly comes to His temple.<sup>9</sup> He shall purge the "sons of Levi," or the priesthood, that they may offer again an offering unto Him in righteousness. The Lord shall sit in judgment against sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers; oppressors of the hireling, the widow, the fatherless;

cheaters of the travelling stranger, or sojourner. None of these is counted as reverencing the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

Men say, "Wherein shall we return?" The prophet provides in reply one specific example and one general principle. The example he cites is the payment of tithes: In their failure to pay their honest tithes, the people of the covenant actually "rob God." For this they get no blessing, but suffer the opposite — the curse. By contrast, in returning to the practice properly, they shall have the windows of heaven opened upon them, and blessings poured out upon their heads too great to number — blessings of protection and productivity.

Then in general the prophet lets the covenant people know that the Lord keeps His word and fulfills His covenant obligations. Men's words have been strong against Him in saying there is no profit in serving Him and keeping His ordinances and commandments properly. They have wearied Him in saying that they who do evil are apparently either approved of the Lord or ignored, for His justice is not evident.<sup>11</sup> The prophet makes it known that they who fear the Lord and encourage each other in doing good are known unto the Lord; for He keeps a "book of remembrance" so that in the day of judgment He may identify His "jewels," discern between them and the wicked, and spare those who have deserved salvation.

Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, one of the first of the prophets who called Israel to repentance, the great Elijah, is to plant in the hearts of the children of the latter day the covenant promises made to the fathers of old. Thereupon, said Malachi, the hearts of the children should turn unto the fathers so that covenants could be made for those who had not made them, and all who would fulfill them could fulfill them.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Lord at His coming would have a nucleus of faithful, covenant members of His kingdom whereby all His redeemed could be organized and brought into the ranks, and the earth could be blessed and not cursed by His coming and His reign.

— Ellis T. Rasmussen.

<sup>4</sup> Malachi 2:10.

<sup>5</sup> See Abraham 1:19, 2:6-9; Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 61:6-11; 62.

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 19:18, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Malachi 2:14, 15.

<sup>8</sup> The word rendered "putting away" is shallach, denoting "to dismiss."

<sup>9</sup> Malachi 3:1; compare Isaiah 40:3 and verses following. John the Baptist as the messenger fulfilling this anticipation in the meridian of

time is so identified in Mark 1:2-4; the same messenger prepares the way for the Fulness of Times. See Joseph Smith's story, verses 68-74, and Doctrine and Covenants 27:7, 8.

<sup>10</sup> See Malachi 3:5.

<sup>11</sup> See Malachi 2:17, 3:14, 15.

<sup>12</sup> See Malachi 4:5, 6; Joseph Smith 2:37-39; Doctrine and Covenants 2. On the fulfillment of this anticipated visit of Elijah, see Doctrine and Covenants 27:9; 110:13-16.



## THE PICTURE

Malachi seems to be speaking to the remnant of the house of Judah, to those who have returned from exile in Babylon. His message is direct and forceful; it is neither weak nor apologetic.

This painting is by Eugene Spiro, an impressionistic artist who is acclaimed internationally, who has exhibited works in France, Germany, and the United States. Its detail, while subdued, is quietly striking. The painting should be viewed from a distance and from different angles. In fact, its impression is clearer and much more striking when it is seen from a distance. Its elements — lines, colors, shades, facial expression and anatomy, shadows, highlights, etc. — create impressions, feelings, moods. Study it; move your chair back away from it; get up and walk farther away and from side to side; sit down again to study its elements, the prophet's features. Does the expression in his eyes communicate something to you? Can you sense an undertone of moods that put you in the picture? What can you tell from the picture of Malachi and his message? Is he made any more real to you on viewing and studying the painting?

The artist, from a deeply religious Jewish family, has only recently been able to fulfill his dream of portraying on canvas the great Old Testament prophets.

Professor Spiro is now 89, and one of the oldest living master painters of the impressionist school. He was born April 18, 1874 in Breslau, Germany. Note the recent date below the artist's signature on this painting.

Works by the artist have been widely exhibited, and he has held a number of prominent posts in circles of art in Europe and in the United States. He received his early training from the Academies of Art at Breslau and Munich and studied under Franz von Stuck.

May the appearance of this picture of Malachi bring to mind the prophet's great and important messages on service, tithing, and genealogical work — to inspire us to live for the Second Coming of Christ, of which Malachi also prophesied.

— *Paul R. Hoopes.*

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(For Course 29, lesson of June 2, "Mission of Elijah"; for Course 24, lesson of June 23, "Neighborliness"; for Course 19, lesson of May 5, "Repentance"; for Course 13, lesson of May 26, "Obedience"; for Course 9, lessons of May 19 and 26: "A Leader Serves the Lord" and "A Leader Is Obedient"; and of general interest.)

LIBRARY FILE REFERENCE: Malachi.



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