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C1341 – December 11, 2013 – Malachi 1
Introduction & Background

We're starting a new study tonight, the Book of Malachi. I had thought to bypass Malachi and do a study of the Intertestamental Times in preparation for the NT Gospel of Matthew but the message of Malachi is so important itself to the background of the NT that I thought it pertinent to teach through it first. So after Malachi then the Intertestamental Times and finally I hope to start the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew is very difficult.

Malachi is rather easy, although this does not mean it does not contain great truths in it, it most assuredly does. The greatest difficulty is the identity of the "messenger" in 3:1 who would pave the way for the LORD and the identity of the Elijah in 4:5 who is to come. Is this messenger who is to come literal Elijah or is he symbolic for John the Baptist. If Elijah is John then this prophecy has *already* been fulfilled and the day of the Lord has come. This would mean that Preterism, the view that all or most of all prophecy has already been fulfilled, is true. On the other hand, if Elijah is Elijah then this prophecy has *not yet* been fulfilled and the day of the Lord is still to come. This would mean that Futurism, the view that all or most of all prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. The question has great bearing on how you view language and history and contingency and Israel and the Church. So how you handle that difficulty will affect in large how you view the entire Bible and we'll be forced to deal with it later on in Malachi and again in the Gospels.

Tonight we'll simply work with the introduction and background. Starting with the Canon, as far as Malachi's status as canonical there is no debate on its canonicity. However, as far as its place in the canon the Jewish and Protestant Canon differ. In the Protestant canon it is the very last book in the OT. It was not always located at the very end of your OT, in the various lists of OT canonical books it takes a number of different locations, although

always with the Twelve. However, it eventually ended up at the very end of the OT. And if Malachi is the last prophet to receive divine revelation before the 400 years of silence then it is a helpful location.

The Jewish canon does not place Malachi as the last book in their OT canon. It was rather placed as the last book in the second section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Nabiim or the "Prophets." The Jews divided the OT into three sections, first the Torah or "Law," second the Nabiim or "Prophets" and third the Kethubim or "Writings." Since the Kethubim is the last section of the Hebrew Bible then our 2 Chronicles is their last book. If you turn to Matt 23:34ff you see Jesus followed the Hebrew order of the Hebrew Bible by recognizing 2 Chronicles as the last book in the Hebrew canon. In this passage He is denouncing the leadership of Israel for rejecting Him and he said, "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city." This is a prophecy of the future rejection of His Messiahship by the nation Israel during the Book of Acts. This rejection of God's revelation would be consistent with the rejection of prior generations in the OT. And why? Verse 35 explains, "that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." What Jesus is saying in verse 35 is that the generation that rejected Him during the Book of Acts, by committing the same sin of prior generations, would be guilty of the rejection of every generation in the OT. If you carefully analyze verse 35 you see that he mentions two people who were God's messengers that were murdered and in the Hebrew canon these two people are the first and last people murdered. Who was the first person murdered in the Hebrew canon? Righteous Abel. What book is he murdered in? Genesis. Genesis is the first book in the Jewish canon. According to verse 35 who was the last person murdered in the Hebrew canon? Zechariah, son of Berechiah. What book is he murdered in? 2 Chronicles. 2 Chronicles is the last book in the Jewish canon. What's Jesus' point? That the generation that would reject Him during the book of Acts would be guilty of the cumulative rejection of all generations living during the OT canon. To confirm this I am reading from The Jewish Bible, the first book, Genesis 4:8, "Cain said to his brother Abel (fn "Come let us go out into the field.") and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. 9The LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother

Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” 10Then He said, “What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.” That’s the first murder in the Jewish canon according to Jesus. And if we turn all the way to the last book in the Jewish Bible we come to 2 Chron 24:19, “The LORD sent prophets among them to bring them back to Him; they admonished them but they would not pay heed. 20Then the spirit of God enveloped Zechariah son of Jehoida the priest; he stood above the people and said to them, “Thus God said: Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD when you cannot succeed? Since you have forsaken the LORD, He has forsaken you.” They conspired against him and pelted him with stones in the court of the House of the LORD, by order of the king. 22King Joash disregarded the loyalty that his father Jehoida had shown to him, and killed his son. As he was dying, he said, “May the LORD see and requite it.” That’s the last murder in the Jewish canon. And Jesus in Matt 23:34-35 was obviously recognizing the order of the Jewish canon where He prophesied that the generation in the Book of Acts would do to His prophets and wise men exactly what prior generations had done to His prophets and wise men in the OT, murder them. And why? So that all the blood of the OT would fall upon that one generation. And did it? Was not that generation destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus in AD70 and the survivors scattered to the four points of the compass? What else was it but a judgment on that generation?

So we see that the Jews and Protestants both include Malachi in their canon but they differ in the placement of Malachi in the canon. However, they both also agree that Malachi is the last prophet of the OT time period and as such the Jews referred to him as “the seal of the prophets.” He was the seal because God stopped speaking at that time, it went dead silent, and there were no more prophets in the formerly unbroken line of prophets. On that point both Jews and Protestants agree. However, we disagree on when God began speaking again. In Protestantism we claim that God began speaking again through John the Baptist who introduced the King in the NT. He, we say, was prospectively the one prophesied in Malachi 3:1 to be the messenger who would clear the way before the Lord, a verse quoted three times in the NT and applied to John the Baptizer. Which brings us back to the question, is John Elijah? On the other hand Judaism claims that God has never spoken Scripture again, that God has now been silent for 2,400 years and therefore Elijah has not come and the King has not come. In the Passover they are still

waiting for Elijah and for their King to come. And that is a very large difference between Judaism and Protestantism. We say that when John came he announced the coming King and if the nation had received Him then John was Elijah and so God's highest revelation had already come. And thus God has broken the silence in the NT and the NT is verbal, plenary divine revelation. But Judaism says Malachi's messenger has yet to come and announce the coming King. So God has remained silent all this time and the NT is not divine revelation. So in their eyes Malachi is "the seal of the prophets." But for the Protestant John in the Revelation is "the seal of the prophets." In him God has ceased speaking. So we honor the OT and NT but they only honor the OT. And that difference is one major divide between Judaism and Protestantism. But we agree that with Malachi God did cease to give verbal revelation for a long period of time.

Now let's move to the Title of the Book. Traditionally the book is called Malachi and this comes from the English translation of 1:1, "The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi." But whether *mal aki* should be translated as a proper name is a point of dispute. Those who oppose the translation of *mal aki* as a proper name give four arguments for it being translated as "my messenger" in tandem with 3:1. First, the Jews argue that it is merely an epithet for the mission of the author. He was God's messenger. As such, the Greek translation of the OT (LXX) translates 1:1 as "his messenger." The Targums, ancient Aramaic paraphrases of the OT, do not consider Malachi the author but rather attribute it to Ezra. The Talmud, ancient Jewish commentary on the OT, does not consider Malachi the author but rather Mordecai. However, the identity of the author as either Ezra or Mordecai are simply traditions that do not derive from any biblical authority. Second, the word *mal aki* as used in 3:1 as an anonymous designation for "my messenger" and so should be considered in 1:1. However, it is more likely that the author in 3:1 is making a wordplay with the prophets name in 1:1, connecting Malachi as the last prophet of the OT with John the Baptist as the first prophet of the NT. Third, the book is the last of three oracles or burdens preceded by Zech 9-11 and 12-14. However, Malachi's oracle is introduced differently than Zechariah's oracles. Finally, since none of the prophetic books are anonymous then it would be strange indeed for this prophetic book to be the exception. So I take it that Malachi is the actual name of the prophet and his name means "my messenger" to connect him

with a major prophecy of the book which is God's coming messenger we identify as John the Baptist, who would pave the way for the King.

Now let's move to the Date of the Book. The date of writing is difficult to ascertain because there are no references to ruling kings or other contemporaries that help determine the time period. However, there are internal factors that point to his book as contemporary to Nehemiah. First, the book is the last of the twelve and therefore supports a later date than the rest of the twelve. In general the order of the twelve supports the order of composition. The first nine were written before the Exile to Babylon and the last three were written after the Exile to Babylon during the kingdom of Persia. Malachi was therefore likely written during the kingdom of Persia. Second, the Talmud grouped Malachi with two other prophets who wrote during the kingdom of Persia, Haggai and Zechariah. Since Haggai and Zechariah wrote during the kingdom of Persia around 520BC (Ezra 5) then Malachi likely wrote during the kingdom of Persia. Third, the term used of "governor" in 1:8 is a Persian word and this supports the contention that the book was written within the kingdom of Persia (539-331BC). Fourth, the picture in Malachi is that the Temple had already been built and sacrifices were being offered. The Temple was not completed until 515BC. Thus Malachi could not have been written before 515BC. Fifth, Malachi indicates that the priests had grown lax and rebellious in their offering of sacrifice. This does not fit the picture of the sacrifices during the governorship of Zerubbabel beginning in 515BC but it does fit the picture of the sacrifices being re-instituted during the governorship of Nehemiah from 444-420. Sixth, while the Soncino commentary considers the book to have written just prior to Ezra and Nehemiah in order to set the stage for their respective ministries (ca 460BC) the situation in life seems to fit more accurately the latter time of Nehemiah. Both Malachi and Nehemiah mention the improper sacrifices offered by priests, the refusal to pay tithes to the Temple and the intermarriage with foreigners (cf Neh 13). Therefore it seems most likely that Malachi wrote in the times of Nehemiah. Unger holds that it was written sometime after his first term as governor, between 433-400. Alden posited it can be narrowed down to the few years Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem beginning in 432BC. Probably Malachi wrote sometime around 430BC and addressed the same concerns Nehemiah addressed when he returned to Jerusalem for his second term as governor.

As for the historical background, God entered into an unconditional covenant with Abraham, repeated to Isaac, Jacob and the twelve tribes. He promised in the Covenant an eternal land, seed and global blessing. As such no matter what Israel did God's faithfulness secured final destiny of the nation in her land. However, at Mt Sinai God entered into a conditional covenant with the nation promising blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. If Israel obeyed she would enjoy blessing in the land; if Israel disobeyed she would not enjoy blessing in the land. Moses' generation did not enter the land because of disobedience. Joshua's generation was more obedient and they entered the land and conquered much of it but their obedience was only partial and so the conquest was only partial. During the times of the judges obedience and disobedience waxed and waned so the blessing and cursing followed. In the time of King David there was much obedience and so the nation conquered much of the land and enjoyed prosperity. Solomon in his early years was obedient and conquered even further though the fullness of the Promised Land was never attained or enjoyed. His later reign was tainted by disobedience and consequently cursing began. God revealed that Solomon's kingdom would ultimately be divided. In the reign of Rehoboam this division took place. At this time there were now two kingdoms; Israel in the north composed of ten tribes and Judah in the south composed of two tribes. The northern kingdom declined rapidly into disobedience, cascading through the five degrees of divine discipline outlined in Lev 26 and ultimately going into exile to Assyria in 721BC. At the same time the southern kingdom declined into disobedience as well, though not as rapidly as the northern kingdom because they had the stabilizing Davidic covenant. Nevertheless eventually they went into exile to Babylon in three deportations, 606/605BC, 597BC and 588-586BC. In 586BC the times of the Gentiles began since there was no Davidic king ruling on the throne in Jerusalem. However, to secure the birth of the coming Davidic king in the land the southern kingdom was given promises of restoration after seventy years. In fulfillment in 539BC, Cyrus the Persian defeated the Babylonians. Upon taking the throne in 538BC he issued a decree for the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple. This was the beginning of the physical restoration of the Jewish people. Zerubbabel along with 50,000 Jews returned, laid the foundation of the Temple, constructed the altar and began sacrificing in 535BC. However, their enemies, seeing their progress, hindered the work and they ceased rebuilding. In 520BC Haggai and Zechariah rose up to encourage the people to complete the rebuilding. They acquired letters from King Darius that permitted the

rebuilding to continue. By 515BC the Temple was completed and sacrifices were re-instated. The worship system gradually eroded until 471BC when our attention is turned to the events of the Book of Esther in the palace at Susa. Anti-Semitism had crept into the Persian Empire but the attempted genocide of the Jews was overturned by the providential work of God through King Ahasuerus, Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, Haman and others. As a result the Jews were given a prominent place in Persian society. In 458BC King Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to return to the land to restore the Temple worship to proper ceremonial procedures. He brought with him a small band of priests and Levites. When he arrived he adorned the Temple and probably began rebuilding the walls. When he discovered the people were living in disobedience to the Law and he confronted them with their sin and led them in confession and restoration. In 445BC Nehemiah heard the report that the city and the people were in disrepute and so he requested of King Artaxerxes that he return and rebuild the city. Having his request granted he returned in 444BC to lead the people in rebuilding the city walls and gates. By God's grace they completed the construction project in just fifty-two days. At this time the physical restoration was complete. Jerusalem was now a fortified city with a functioning Temple. Working in tandem with Ezra, Nehemiah began to work on the spiritual restoration of the people. At the reading of the Law the people desired to confess and they renewed the Mosaic Covenant. In 432BC, after serving twelve years as governor in Jerusalem Nehemiah returned to the Persian king. In his absence the people turned back to disobedience; the priests were lax in their duties, tithes were not being paid and the people had begun intermarrying foreigners again. As a consequence God began to curse them. Since Malachi mentions these same sins and curses it is likely that when Nehemiah returned they worked together to correct these abuses. The nation needed to maintain some semblance of obedience in order to remain in the land in preparation for the coming King. While Malachi called for a true internal heart obedience it turned out that the people only maintained an external appearance of obedience. As Tom Constable says, "The external conditions that needed correcting were the rebuilding of the altar of sacrifice, the temple, and the walls of Jerusalem. They were successful in changing these external conditions, but they were less successful in changing the internal conditions of the people. It is these conditions that Malachi addressed."ⁱ Unfortunately the people were not very responsive and during the intertestamental times a Pharisaic ritualism set in on one hand and a Sadducean materialism on the other. These two groups

dominate the NT landscape. How these two groups developed remains to be seen in the intertestamental times but the origin of these groups can be seen as early as Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi.

The Structure of the Book is easy to follow. It is an oracle revealing the six sins Israel needed to correct. Verse 1 says the book is “The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel.” The Hebrew word “oracle” refers to a “burdensome message.” Malachi’s message is a burdensome one because Israel was living in disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant and therefore under the threat of divine cursing. In fact, they were already being cursed. In order to receive divine blessing they needed to repent and return to covenant obedience. The book is written to reveal the six sins they needed to repent of. First, in 1:2-5 they doubted God’s love for them in the Abrahamic Covenant. They needed to repent of this doubt and respond to God’s love. Under the Abrahamic Covenant God had marked out for them unconditional covenant blessing in the land. Despite present disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant God’s love for them under the Abrahamic Covenant was irrevocable. God would never turn back on His promise to ultimately restore them and bless them. However, the enjoyment of that blessing was conditioned on obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. First and foremost they needed to repent of their doubting God’s love. Second, in 1:6-2:9 the priests dishonored God by offering blemished sacrifices and had grown tired of Temple worship. They needed to repent of offering these dishonoring sacrifices either by shutting down the Temple worship altogether or correcting it. If they did not listen God would send the curse upon them. In fact, He already had since the worship had become nothing more than religious ritual. Third, in 2:10-16 the people dealt treacherously with one another by divorcing Jewish wives and marrying pagan girls. This brought idolatry into the nation and corrupted the offspring. They needed to repent of these divorces and not deal treacherously with their fellows Jews. Fourth, in 2:17-3:7 the people turned justice upside down by declaring evil to be good. God would send His messenger before Him to judge and remove these evil doers so as to purify for Himself a people who would worship Him in righteousness. If it were not for His unchangeable purposes in the Abrahamic Covenant the entire nation would be consumed. They needed to repent and return to Him so that He could return to them. Fifth, in 3:8-12 the people had robbed God by refusing to pay the whole tithe. They needed to bring in the whole tithe so the Temple worship system could function properly. If they did God would bless them above all nations making

it a delightful land. Sixth, in 3:13-4:6 they had spoken out strongly against the Lord in stating that He did not do what He said He would do. They needed to realize that they were seriously misreading history and that in fact there was a day He was coming to judge and make everything right. Only those who feared Him would be spared in that day. So in order to fear Him they needed to remember the Law of Moses and repent. God would send Elijah before that day to restore them so that He would not smite the land with a curse.

So these six sins Israel was committing needed to be repented of in order for them to enjoy blessing in the land. To secure the repentance an interesting method is used to keep the audience's attention and interest. Hebrew commentators refer to this as the question/answer format. This format of instruction was later developed in the Rabbinical schools as a way of prompting their students to think. By NT times it was thoroughly in use as reflected by Jesus in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 3:7; 11:7-9; 12:26-27; Luke 14:5; John 18:38) and Paul in the Epistles (cf. Rom. 3:1-4; 4:1-3; 6:21; 7:7; 1 Cor. 9:7-13; Gal. 3:21; Heb. 1:14).ⁱⁱ This method of rhetorical questioning is a very effective teaching technique. The way it is most used in Malachi is by involving three elements. First, a truth is stated, second, the truth is questioned, and third, the truth is proven. So, for example, in 1:2, God states the truth, "I have loved you." But the nation Israel questions the truth that God has loved them by asking, "How have You loved us?" Finally God proves the truth that He has loved them by saying, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." It was clear that the inheritance God gave Jacob was far superior to Esau's. There was no arguing the point. Observe again how the truth was stated, the truth was questioned then the truth was proven. For another example look at 1:6. God states a truth, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master." He then asks "Then if I am a father, where is My honor?" The nation Israel then questions the truth that they had not honored Him by asking, "How have we despised Your name?" Lastly God proves the truth that they had despised His name by "presenting defiled food upon" His "altar." Further questions are given to stimulate the people to consider their ways and hopefully repent. The point of this question/answer technique is to convict the nation so that they will repent and He can bless them rather than curse them. We see this technique used by God as early as His confrontation

with Adam in Gen 3. So the technique is not new but Malachi goes a long way in developing this technique and it was taken from here and built into Rabbinical schools during the intertestamental times.

Now we observe in these question/answer dialogues that each time the truth of their sin is stated the people challenged the truth. In effect they asked over and over, “How have we done that? We don’t see that we have done that.” This points to the fact that the nation is already hardened of heart and insensitive to sin, they no longer feared the Lord, they were careless and calloused. This is a condition that results from sinning and sinning and sinning without confessing for a long period of time. Paul Benware says one of the keys “to understanding Malachi’s message is to see the underlying cause for Israel’s sinfulness. Israel’s various sins were symptomatic of the fact that Israel had lost her fear of God. She no longer truly revered the Lord. The fear of the Lord involved an awe of the Lord and a commitment to Him. It included obedience, love, and loyalty. This lack of fear was the key to her sinful attitudes and actions.”ⁱⁱⁱ To point up this key to the book Malachi mentions the fear of the Lord seven times in his book. First, in 1:6 when God is asking them questions He says, “And if I am a master, where is My respect?” The Hebrew word is “fear.” “Where is My fear?” God is asking. The priests did not fear Him as they should and this was the underlying problem resulting in their offering defiled sacrifices. If they truly feared Him they would offer proper sacrifices. Second, in 2:5 God speaks of His earlier covenant with the Levitical priesthood in Numb 25 where Phinehas made atonement for the sons of Israel in order to stop the plague which had already killed 24,000. God said of the covenant made at that time, “My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence, so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name...” etc...etc...The Hebrew words translated “reverence” and “revered” are “fear.” God made this covenant with Phinehas to bring about a lasting fear so they would serve Him properly in the Temple. But where was this fear now among the priests? It was all but absent and there again, the underlying problem among the priests was the lack of a healthy fear of God. They needed to regain the fear of the Lord. Third, in 3:5 when God warns of judgment He says, “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the

Lord of hosts.” Clearly the fear of the Lord underlies all these sins. If the people feared the Lord then they would not engage in these sins. Fourth, by way of strong contrast, in 4:2, there were those who did fear the Lord. “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall...” He refers to the blessing that would come upon those who feared Him. In particular He is referring to blessing in the kingdom. So then we see that the fear of the Lord is the underlying factor that distinguishes those who would enjoy blessing in the kingdom from those who would not enjoy blessing in the kingdom. Another author says of the majority, “their perception of God” had grown dim. They needed a renewed respect for God.

This leads to the Theology of the Book. What does the Book teach us about God? First, it teaches us that God is loving. He loves Israel with a covenant love. In Mal 1:2 God says, “I have loved you.” God is a God of love. The nation Israel questioned this love because their circumstances were governing their interpretation of Him. Yet God reminds them that they were short-sighted because their circumstances actually proved His love for them and left no room for doubt. Second, it teaches that God is immutable. In Mal 3:6 God says, “I the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” For Israel to be consumed would mean an essential change in God. But God does not undergo essential changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. His character is forever perfectly stable. Therefore God’s promises to Israel must come to pass exactly as originally promised or else God is not God. Third, it teaches us that God is just. In Mal 3:18 we have a clear statement of God’s justice, “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.” God never compromises His character. While He gives grace before judgment eventually grace comes to an end and judgment ensues. Every chapter of Malachi demonstrates God’s justice. Fourth, it teaches us that God is sovereign over all nations, not just Israel. In Mal 2:16 the Lord reminds Israel that even the nations fear Him. “But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,” a sovereign “says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.” God is sovereign over all nations of the earth. He is not a local deity but one who is over all creation.

As for the Theme of the Book, the theme is that despite their failure to fear God, God still loved them and had an inheritance for them (1:2-5). He loved them because of His covenant love, His special choice of them. He begins the book by reminding them of His special love for them by contrasting the fates of the twin brothers Esau and Jacob. God had chosen to love Jacob with a covenant love before he was even born so that His election of him was not based on anything Jacob had done but on God who has mercy. Election has as its key purpose to reveal the mercy of God. Without it God would not be seen to be merciful. Thus election serves a necessary part of the doxological purpose of God. God's ultimate purpose in history is to glorify Himself.

Purposes, what are the Purposes of the Book? The first purpose of the book is to convict the priests and the people of their sin. The priests were the leaders of the people. They represented the people before God. They offered sacrifices first for their sin and then for the sin of the people. However, the priests were not honoring God in their sacrifices. The quality of the sacrifices was not up to God's standards. Therefore they were not acceptable to God and His wrath was kindled. Since the priests led by a sinful example the people followed them in sinful practices. So the first purpose was to convict the priests and the people of their sin. The second purpose was that they would repent of these sins and return to God. God reminded them that He was sending His messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah and that the people should listen to Him because when the Messiah came He would come with great and mighty judgment. Only those who repented would be spared and enter into eternal blessing. The third purpose of the book is to reveal the name of the prophet who would come before the great judgment and return the people to the Lord. As God named Cyrus beforehand He named Elijah as the prophet who would come. As such many scholars think that one of the two witnesses during the future Tribulation will be Elijah.

Message. What is the Message of Malachi? The message begins with God's love for Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant. God promised in this covenant to bless the nation Israel in the land and the whole world through Israel. However, God also made the Mosaic Covenant with the nation Israel promising blessing for obedience to the Law and cursing for disobedience. Historically Israel continually disobeyed God because they had no heart in them to do righteousness. They therefore were suffering under divine discipline. Eventually God would send His messenger Elijah in the day of the

Lord and he would prepare the way for the Lord. When the Lord came He would bring in mighty judgment. Those who remained unrepentant would be set afire in the blaze of His judgment. Those who repented would be spared and brought into eternal kingdom blessing. Ultimately the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled to the believing remnant of the nation Israel.

It's significant that the last word of the OT relates to the coming of Elijah to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that the Lord will not come and smite the land with a curse. If God did not send Elijah in the future for this important ministry then Israel could never enjoy the land. In a very real sense then, when the NT opens, could John be Elijah? If the nation repented then their King would come in His kingdom with all the attendant blessing in the land. Would that make John Elijah? Our Lord said, "If you receive Me then John is Elijah. But the nation did not receive Him and thus John was not Elijah and so the King smote the land with a curse.

Malachi is a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament because it underscores the sinful human condition and anticipates God's solution in the work of the coming Messiah.¹

ⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Zec 14:21)*. Galaxie Software.

ⁱⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Zec 14:21)*. Galaxie Software.

ⁱⁱⁱ Benware, Paul, *Survey of the Old Testament*, p 236.

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¹ Wilkinson, B., & Boa, K. (1983). *Talk thru the Bible* (p. 297). Nashville: T. Nelson.