

The Questor

God's Messengers....

.... Malachi

We now come to the last of the prophets as recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. His name was Malachi and he was active during the period 460 to 430BC. That was about 80 years after Haggai and Zechariah had been encouraging the people to rebuild the Temple following their return from exile in Babylon.

Since that time, disillusionment had set in. They had returned to their homeland – ‘the Promised land’ – with an expectation of good and prosperous times. But it was harder than they’d expected and the longed for prosperity hadn’t materialised. Add to that, they were still a province of Babylon not a nation, and were ruled by a Governor appointed by Babylon.

All of this led to a feeling that God had let them down and that the prophets had misled them. And the result was a casual attitude to worship and to God’s law. So it was Malachi’s role to address these issues by delivering a number of messages from God.

He starts off by telling them how much God loves them. But the people find it difficult to take this message on board and ask how he has loved them. God’s reply is that he has always loved them, simply because he loves them. And that’s still true for us today. It may be difficult for us to comprehend the depth of love God has for each one of us. It may also be difficult for us to feel that love. But it’s there and freely offered to us.

The next message isn’t so comfortable. Malachi points out that the people have neither honoured God as a Father nor respected him as a Master – but again they don’t seem to know why or how. It seems that the priests may have been too relaxed with regard to the Law, particularly as regards worship and sacrifices. So, whereas the Law demanded the sacrifice of the best of the flock, the people were offering lame or diseased animals. Malachi pointed out that what

they were offering to God they wouldn’t dare offer to the Governor.

That was hurtful to God who reminds the people that he will always be great and supreme whether they honour him or not. He says that if they don’t change their attitude towards him, they may as well close the temple doors. So it’s reasonable to assume that he feels the same today. He expects us to honour him too, to regard him with awe and wonder.

The next message was to the priests who were of the tribe of Levi, whom God had ordained as the priestly tribe. God had cherished Levi but his descendents had let down Levi, God and the people they were supposed to serve. They had lost sight of the covenant between the people and God and allowed worship to become sloppy and a token affair.

Not only that but they were turning a blind eye to what was going on in society. Old men were divorcing their wife and visiting the prostitutes in pagan temples; the people were withholding tithes from the temple and they were defrauding labourers, oppressing widows and orphans and depriving foreigners among them of justice. Sound familiar?

And then we come to a different kind of prophecy, a message that is very similar to what we read in Revelation. It’s a message that reminds us that God is supreme and will have the final word. There will come a time when, as Jesus said, the sheep and the goats will be separated. The people who have developed a relationship with God will be cherished and enjoy his favour; but those who have ignored him or treated him with disdain and rejection will be rejected themselves.

There is so much in this prophecy that relates to our times. We need to heed it.