

## Contradicting God: Sermon Outline

### The Book of Malachi

- I. Nehemiah
  - A. Chronologically Nehemiah should be at the end of the Bible just before Malachi.
  - B. Nehemiah and Malachi take place at the same time, same place, same people, same problem.
    1. Nehemiah lead the second wave of released captives from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.
    2. Nehemiah chapter 10—Israel is optimistic, spiritual revived, making promises to God. By chapter 13, Israel drifts from God and their promises to Him.
  - C. Nehemiah tries to bring them back to God and put them back on course.
    1. Malachi inherits the fickle every changing people.
- II. The pattern of Nations and Man.
  - A. Trials and tribulations.
  - B. Elevation of God.
  - C. Complacency (self- sufficiency).
  - D. Return to trials and tribulations.
    1. The central issue is the elevation of the self and the lowering of God.
- III. The pattern in Nehemiah.
  - A. Elevation of God.
    1. Nehemiah 10:28-29 “We will obey your laws”
    2. 10:30—*We will not take foreign wives.*
    3. 10:31—*We will not violate the Sabbath.*
    4. 10:32—*We will tithe.*
    5. 10:33—*We’re all in God!*
  - B. Complacency (self-sufficiency).
    1. 13:10—Tithe is gone.
    2. 13:11-15—The Sabbath is violated.

3. 13:23-24—They took wives from foreigners.

#### IV. Malachi.

- A. The problem wasn't paganism, it was "post-God"
  1. C.S. Lewis responding to the "paganism" of London in the 1940's-- "*Would to God that London was pagan, what we see in London is post-Christianity...*"
- B. Of the 55 verses, 47 of them are spoken by God in the 1<sup>st</sup> person.
- C. God calls out Israel on eight issues, each time Israel responds with a (sarcastic, contradictory) question.
  1. In what way have You loved us?
  2. In what way have we despised Your name?
  3. In what way have we defiled You?
  4. For what reason do you not receive our offering?
  5. In what way have we wearied You?
  6. In what way shall we return to You?
  7. In what way have we robbed You?
  8. What have we spoken against you?

#### V. Ministry

- A. Chapter 1:7-13 They offered their "left-overs" to God.
  1. **"What you present to Me despises my name!...you've defiled Me!"**
- B. Chapter 3:13-15 The people were "arrogant" towards God—"we've served You, where did it get us?"
- C. Chapter 2:1-9 The hypocrisy of the priesthood.

#### VI. Marriage

- A. The problem was not in marriage itself, but they were treating their wives "treacherously" and getting out of their marriages.
  1. To violate the marriage vows is to dishonor God.
  2. Chapter 2:16—God hates divorce.
- B. The marriage with foreign wives—"your foreign wife will turn you against God."

#### VII. Money.

- A. Chapter 3:8-12 They did not keep the tithe.

## **Contradicting God: Sermon Notes**

### **The Book of Malachi**

This morning we come to the last of the Minor Prophets in the Bible... the last book of the Old Testament... the last prophet in the Old Testament and my last message on the minor prophets...not that we're finished with the minor prophets..... for the next two weeks you will get a different perspective on the two remaining books on our list that I jumped over... Zechariah and Haggai with Randy...

It's been a challenge this summer to go through entire books...even though they're short on one Sunday... but I hope you have seen the benefit in doing "flyovers" so to speak... even though I value verse by verse exposition of the Bible... doing maybe five or six verses a week... to get a birds eye view and see the big picture... all the landscape from a few thousand feet has been a great benefit.

If you've ever flown over your house in a plane... you see it from a perspective that you don't get from walking in your neighborhood... you see the context... the big picture... *"I didn't know there was a canyon there!"*

So this morning it's Malachi... so would you please turn in your Bibles to the book of Nehemiah... yes...Nehemiah....Nehemiah is tucked more towards the beginning of the Bible...about mid-way through the Old Testament... before Esther and Job...Many don't realize the Bible is not in chronological order...

Nehemiah is not older than say, the book of Job which comes after... Job may well be the oldest book of the Bible but it comes 16 books after Genesis...the first book of the Bible.... Nehemiah's place chronologically would be towards the end of the Old Testament... perhaps second to last...right before Malachi.

Nehemiah is crucial to our understanding what's going on in Malachi... so this morning you get a partial two for one.... So turn to Nehemiah chapter 10...Nehemiah and Malachi lived at the same time... their prophesies are at the same time... they are dealing with the same people...with the same issues.

Remember that after the two kingdoms fell... the northern kingdom first... the Southern kingdom some 130 years later... the Southern kingdom was exiled to Babylon for 70 years... then released to go back to Zion and a ruined Jerusalem....

Ezra led the first wave of returning captives with the mission to rebuild the temple...remember last week we looked at Zechariah... Zechariah (and Haggai) came to relight the fire under the lethargic depressed, discouraged, stalled temple builders Israel...the temple finally gets completed...

Nehemiah returned with the next wave with the mission of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem... by the time we get to Malachi... the temple and the wall had been completed...

Nehemiah chapters ten and thirteen, which we will look at briefly... are events that took place just before and during the events in Malachi... Chapter 10 takes place after all the exiled people have returned to Israel... what I hope we will all see is a pattern that takes place... a pattern that has taken place throughout the Old Testament ...throughout the New Testament and continues to this day.

The pattern is **Trials and tribulations-----Elevation of God-----Complacency (self sufficiency)-----trials and tribulations....**

The pattern here begins in Nehemiah 10 with Israel being excited for their new beginning in God's restored Promised Land...when you've been through difficult times... and being in exile in Babylon for 70 years... were difficult times for Israel... and when those difficult times come to an end.... Not only is their relief.... But there's excitement to begin afresh.

When everything is stripped away... and you have nothing... you tend to get very close to God...that's when you return to church... that's when you polish off your Bible... we all do that... when there's nothing left... and you're desperate... God is supreme....that's where we are in Nehemiah 10.

Revival surrounds chapter 10... they worshipped heartily in the temple... temple sacrifices began again... blood is flowing through the sacrificial practice by the priests... *Happy days are here again!*

The movement of God is everywhere... Nehemiah hears the people make incredible promises to God.

### **Read Nehemiah 10:28-29**

Things are great!!!...*God... we promise to do EVERYTHING You want and ask of us... not one of Your laws will we ever break again!...God You are so good...* and notice verse 30... no little promise:

### **Read verse 30**

*God... you told us not to take wives from foreigners... we won't take wives from foreigners... we will never do again what we've been guilty of in the past... We pledge ourselves to You God and only You!*

### **Read verse 31**

*WE WILL NEVER VIOLATE YOUR SABBATH GOD!... That is Your day!...there is a sense of revival... a sense of finally getting it right!*

### **Read verse 32**

*And God... we will resurrect the tithe... it's Your money God!*

**Read verse 33**

*We're all in God!... we NEVER want to go back from where we came!.... We've learned our lessons... we know You are God!*

Get the picture?...They are "All in to God's program".... **That's what ALWAYS follows captivity!**... the pattern continues to reveal itself...only a few years later... chapter thirteen... it's already a different story...

After they PROMISED and PLEDGED to obey ALL of God's laws and expectations... you would hardly recognize these people... kind of like our New Years resolutions... How many of you are still reading through that Bible in One Year plan you began January 1<sup>st</sup>?...How many of you made it past Leviticus?

How's the diet going?... getting off of social media..... After chapter ten Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem to go to Persia which he had planned... while he was gone... Israel returned to their former ways....

**Read Nehemiah 13:6-7**

Eliashib was a wicked high priest... not everyone who in in ministry should be in ministry... Eliashib did not edify his people.... he corrupted them to return to their previous ways...

**Read verses 8-9**

Nehemiah's back!

**Read verse 10**

The tithe is already gone... the singing in the temple was gone... the worship was compromised.

**Read 11, 15**

They also broke the Sabbath... so much for pledges to God... So much for promises to God!...WHAT'S GOING ON!?!...

**Read verses 19-21**

It's the Sabbath!... *WE WILL NEVER VIOLATE YOUR SABBATH GOD!... That is Your day Lord!*

**Read verse 23-24**

*God... you told us not to take wives from foreigners... we won't take wives from foreigners... we will never do again what we've been guilty of in the past... We pledge ourselves to You God and only You!....*

You don't want to mess with Nehemiah

## Read verse 25

That's my favorite verse in Nehemiah....great pastoral counseling!!!... **You broke all of your promises to God... so I'll bash your heads in and pull your hair...and MADE them swear by God...** can't you just see it?... They didn't teach us that technique in seminary!...but I get it!

The fires of revival have petered out!... Nehemiah could only do so much.

## Read verses 13: 30-31

Nehemiah concludes with Israel in somewhat better condition... Nehemiah sets them back on course... Nehemiah is finished with his work...so...God raised up one last prophet to prophesy to His children Israel just before He goes silent for over 400 years.

His name is "Malachi"... some believe that is not his actual name but rather a description of what he was to do... "Malachi" means "My Angel" or "My Messenger"... Malachi was God's final messenger under the Old Covenant.

There's an unknown gap between the end of Nehemiah's story and Malachi's.... some think it's about a ten year gap... but it didn't take long for Israel to again become complacent... cynical... all the vices are back... there's intermarriage...compromise... religious stagnation... no Sabbath... there's divorce...tithing is out the window... weak homes... and a weak spirit.... listen to this description by commentator Carl Yates:

*"The people were in the midst of an economic collapse, crops were poor, parasites ruined the plants, the fruit was disappointing. The priests were so corrupt and immoral that a sense of cynicism pervaded the entire population. The people complained against God., bemoaned their sad plight. Refused to pay their tithes and offerings. They were guilty of social injustice and had mixed themselves with the heathen people of the land...divorce was common" God's covenant had been forgotten... This was Malachi's audience.*

Something C.S. Lewis said many years ago is haunting to hear... Lewis was talking to a fellow theologian who was lamenting about how sad the condition of London was in...how "pagan" it had become.

Lewis pondered that lament... then he said these words *"Would to God that London was pagan...what we see in London is post-Christianity..."*

What Nehemiah saw... what Malachi saw... what C.S. Lewis saw.... What we all see in our country today... is the tragedy of post-Christianity!

The tragedy in Israel is not paganism!... *"oh if it were just paganism!"*...if it was paganism all that would need to be done is to convert them...no!... it is something far worse!... It is a country who came to know God... God blessed them...they tasted His blessings... they feasted at His table.... And they have turned their back on Him!... that is far worse than just being pagan!

To have seen the light!... and then to snuff it out,, *"We swear before God to keep his commandments... to keep His laws.... To honor Him and worship Him"*... only to drift and wander... back to their selfish self-centered lives....

Before you think or say something like “boy isn’t that a shame, to be a people like that”... you don’t need a club over the head to realize this is our time as well...not the paganism...but the post-Christianity in our own land. [we are not a country who hasn’t heard about God]

Before I go any further... I want to identify the very center of the reason we go on these cycles... both as nations and as individuals... why do we go from **Trials and tribulations-----Elevation of God-----Complacency (self- sufficiency)-----trials and tribulations....?**

One of the most important books for at least the last decade is Carl Truman’s “*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*”...I’ve referred to this book before... A complex, difficult read but it is based on a particular statement... and the question “*why and how has this statement come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful*” this statement... if asked twenty, thirty, fifty years ago would have put puzzled looks on faces. ...today it does not.

The statement is “*I am a woman trapped in a man’s body*”... today, as Truman observes... *that statement is not just meaningful, but so significant that to deny it or question it in some way is to reveal oneself as stupid, immoral, or subject to yet another irrational phobia.*”

How did that happen?

If I was to boil down 407 pages of detailed explanation to one word it would be “individualism”.... In this sense of the word... it is as the title of the book suggests... it is the rise and triumph of the...self.

That entails the elimination of anything, anyone else that has been higher than the self.... God!... now think about this... If man with a thoroughly saturated sin nature... allows that sin nature to be the source of reason... the world view... the “moral” conscience... then everything coming from man will be base... wretched and just plain upside down!

Paul’s words to the church at Ephesus:

**They (those without God) are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**

**Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (Ephesians 4:18–19)**

2 Timothy 3:2

**For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy...**

Malachi... interesting to note... there are 55 verses in Malachi... 47 of those are in the 1<sup>st</sup> person spoken by the Lord.... If there ever was an example of the word of God... Malachi is it... very little commentary from Malachi... this is the Lord speaking...this is the Lord truly and literally speaking through His prophet...Malachi.

As a result of all this spiritual apathy and cynicism... God is going to call Israel out on a few things... and EVERY time He does... the people respond by asking questions.... They are NOT asking questions because they are interested in getting an answer... they aren't wanting to learn anything...

Their questions are actually sarcastic... contradictory things regarding what God is saying... in other words... they're being jerks... there are eight questions the people respond to God with... eight times... let's look:

**Read verse 1:2**

**Read verse 1:6**

**Read verse 1:7**

**Read 2:13-14**

**Read 2:17**

**Read 3:6-7**

**Read 3:8**

**Read 3:13**

To summarize those eight contradictory responses to God... the people responded:

1. In what way have You loved us?
2. In what way have we despised Your name?
3. In what way have we defiled You?
4. For what reason do you not receive our offering?
5. In what way have we wearied You?
6. In what way shall we return to You?
7. In what way have we robbed You?
8. What have we spoken against you?

What God does is He basically takes all eight of these questions and deals with them in three categories... You can put all these in these categories: Ministry, Marriage, and Money... these three areas are the three main areas people (most?) begin to compromise once the pattern has moved past revival... A fervency for God... things are going great... And into a period of complacency... which elevates the self and lessens the reliance on God....

We're going to spend most of our time on the first one ministry... To do justice to the marriage issue I need a month...

## **1. Ministry**



When you enter into that time of complacency... life is easy... life is good... often a feeling of self-centeredness and self-reliance takes over... *“I can do it... I can handle it... I am successful... I did it...I don't need any help...”*

This is when the spiritual life often takes big hits...ministry here is not something only the pastor does... or Sunday School teachers... rather ministry is what all people are to do...also... ministry happens on two planes...

**1. Horizontally when we serve each other**...love one another... care for one another in the name of the Lord... **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel”**... to others.

**2. Vertically when we worship the Lord**...how we honor and love the Lord... how we serve the Lord...this is the ministry that God is calling Israel (and us!) out on here...they have lost their vertical ministry...their devotion to God... let's take a look:

### **Read Chapter 1:7-8**

This is of course when they were still to offer sacrifices to the Lord... all this pointed to the ultimate future sacrifice of the perfect unblemished lamb of God Jesus...who upon His great sacrifice on the cross paid the price for our sins...to be a representation of *that* perfect sacrifice...that would happen in another 350+ years... they were to offer a perfect unblemished lamb for a blood sacrifice on the alter....

One perfect lamb per family of ten... that lamb would temporarily atone for their sins...temporarily... This is all in God's grace... so here... it wasn't that they weren't bringing lambs to be sacrificed... no they were still “religious”...

But what God is saying is “you people are bringing me all the blind lambs...the lame lambs... the lambs that no body would want...sick lambs!

### **Read verse 8**

*“If you offered this lamb to the governor... would he be pleased?”...Look at those lambs!... deformed.... Blind and can't even Baaaa straight!...sick!... this is your left over garbage!...instead of bringing me the cream of the flock you're bringing me the worst of the flock!*

Remember our food pantry?... it's been a few years...people from all over would bring food items... canned goods... other foods...to weekly provide for those who needed food... for the most part everyone was very generous...

but on occasion someone would bring in the most bizarre things.... We had a shelf where we collected this stuff... things like canned fish eyes...

We would get cans of spam dated with no expiration date on them... do you know what that means?... it could be as old as 1937!...and by the looks of the can it probably was.... Expired cream of mushroom soup... rancid peanut butter...it's like they went through their pantry and said *“what can we give to the homeless?”* they brought their sick lambs... thinking somehow that that helps the homeless and the hungry...

**What you do to the least of these you do to me...** But we're talking about God... We are to give God the very best... the best of our time... the best of our abilities... the best of our lives...our best talents... the best.

Today people give their dogs better treatment, respect and honor than they do God!...God says... **what you present to Me despises my name!...you've defiled Me!**

Another way they were dishonoring God was the way they spoke of Him...instead of praising Him and being thankful for all He does and has done... they were complaining about Him with their words.

### **Read Chapter 1:11-13**

***“You bring to me your sick lame offerings... I give you a feast...you eat at my table and you sniff at the food with a curled up nose”***... so they complain that God's commandments are too hard and God is too harsh... that He's not giving them what they want...*why should we obey your ordinances when we see other people who don't even know you seem to get away with everything...*

The same sentiment is over in chapter three..

### **Read 3:13-15**

*“We've served God... We've walked with God... what did it profit us?...it is vain to serve God...”*

For the last twenty or so years I've had a copy of a letter in my filing cabinet that was given to Chuck Swindol back in the early eighties...I kept it knowing that I would most likely some day get a letter like it...I was just entering ministry at the time.... but this letter I think reveals what many of the people of Malachi's day were thinking.... And most likely many today.

The writer of the letter is including his wife....Some of this I've edited and changed some words to keep it “presentable”... It begins with the reference to a book...don't know what the book was...

*“It made me wonder why we are continually treated by God as “illegitimates”...instead of His children. Let me state first that never, nor still do admit we're perfect, we just strived to abide by God's principles, seeking forgiveness for our mistakes. This was especially so for ten years beginning with our being “born again” in 1968. We wish we'd been left alone.*

*Instead we heard sermons, went to seminars, read books, studied scripture, prayed hours and believed that even though there were troubles and problems, God would support and guide and be our strength. NO WAY!*

*{edited} we thought it was ok when we found ourselves friendless, after all God was still in control...Alas to our despair we have found out that corporations are the one's in control, not God!*

*{edited} ...we eventually lost our jobs... our house... we were refused employment. Refused compensation...but we read the Psalms hoping to find comfort...*

*We cried out to God, we let Him work... there was only one door open so we sold our home, packed up and went and it all blew up on us...within ten months there was no job...loss of employment loss of home...now in a totally strange area...we asked ourselves “did God want others to practice what they preach?” ...so we tried [every Christian ministry organization we could find... “Basic Youth” ... our church...met with other Christians...Salvation Army, Praise the Lord Club...you name it we tried it...*

*We ended wishing we never talked, wrote or got involved with any of them...and above all wished we had the money back that we had given them over the years. We are God’s “illegitimates”...He only made our position in life continually worse!...We spent over a decade trying to live by God’s principles...yet trying to not be righteously obnoxious to others...God said “try Me!”...HE FAILED.*

*A Former Believer*

***“You bring to me your sick lame offerings... I give you a feast...you eat at my table and you sniff at the food with a curled up nose”***... so they complain that God’s commandments are too hard and God is too harsh... that He’s not giving them what they want...*why should we obey your ordinances when we see other people who don’t even know you seem to get away with everything...*

Nothing in that letter suggest they EVER gave God their best...there’s a bitterness marked by arrogance... it never was about God... it was all about them!... It was never about God’s glory and honor it was about their success...comfort... and position in life...d their difficulties as a result of entertaining the idea of God.... I think that letter connects many in the world today with the people in Malachi’s day.

He doesn’t let the priests off the hook... as I read these words I could not help but be admonished...

**Read chapter 2:1-2**

There’s a hypocrisy there... you’re going through empty motions priests...

**Read verses 3-4**

He compares Levi to the priest of the day... Levi revered God... He puts the example of Levi next to them... I replace “priest” with “pastor”

**Read verses 5-9**

I can’t read that without it going through my life...my conscience... the thought that if I fail to model God... the church may be led to stumble and they themselves not follow God... I read this week ***“show me a ministry that is marked by laziness and lack of zeal and full of hypocrisy and I will show you a church that is marked by laziness and lacks zeal and full of hypocrisy...Show me indifference among those who counsel and I will show you indifference among those who live out that counsel....*** OUCH!

**2. Marriage**

The problem here in Malachi is not with marriage itself... it is that they don't want to be married any longer... again... as you remove God from your life... if you are in stagnation in your spiritual life... the "Individualistic" life will take over... and as it can turn upside down all of God's design..... it will upside down marriage as well...

### **Read verses 2:13-15**

You do not honor God in your marriage covenant....you've been treating your wives "treacherously"...deceitfully...faithlessly... the men are cheating on their wives... out for what THERE OWN PLEASURE.... Individualism at its height.... You are breaking the covenant you made not just with your wife.... But with God... so divorce was rampant in Israel... as it is today here in America...I don't think I am wrong when I say that divorce is caused by one or both caught up in complete selfishness...

### **Read verse 16**

God hates divorce... He hates it... but God Himself divorced Israel for their unfaithfulness to Him... Jeremiah.

Another problem was that they were maying foreign wives.... Directly against God's commands... why?... Because your foreign wife will turn you against your God....you marry a woman who believes in the God you believe in... believes in your worship and what you do...

## **3. Money**

You're glad I'm out of time for this one...

### **Read chapter 3:8-9**

I don't know how many times I've heard sermons on tithing in the church based on this passage... **You are cursed with a curse, you are robbing Me! says the Lord... Bring in your tithe...10% to the storehouse.... The church!...so that the pastor will have food in his house... and the church can buy a new copy machine....**

*Tithe your 10% and oh.... The offering!... that on top of the 10%!... you might should pay maybe 30%!!!*

What Malachi is saying here is NOT for the church!... this is a message to the Jews who had committed themselves to a "tithe"...the "storehouse" was not a church but a granary...think those big metal cylinder skyscrapers all over the Palouse... actually... a storehouse here was a room in the temple for storing crops and animals...

The storehouses needed to be continuously replenished to take care of the priests and their ministries... and a real tithe was not a tenth... it was a fifth!...what was happening is that they were bringing in less and less replenishment for the storehouse...

The priest were not getting enough to support them in their ministry and they had to go back to farming... when that happens... the entire nations spiritual life takes a dive... things are left undone... widows and orphans are left without support...

Resulting in the REAL problem and that was THEY WERE NOT KEEPING THEIR WORD TO GOD.... it was God who was being robbed.

**Read verse 10**

God tells them if they tithe... stick with their commitment made with God... He will bless them... the principle for us here... keep your commitments to God... as far as you money goes... it's all God's.... steward it well... use it as a part of funding the Great Commission...

Make your entire life...all that you do...all that you can do... your talents and gifts... all that you have... all that you are be a blessing to God.

The last chapter is a great prophesy of the coming Messiah... our Savior Jesus Christ...

**Read 4:2**

The minor prophets are tough... but they are so very hopeful...