

Malachi

To the Nephites and Lamanites the risen Savior quoted sections of the prophecies of Malachi, stating that the Father himself had commanded him to do so. The reason, he stated, was "that they should be given unto future generations" (3 Ne. 24:1; 26:2). Those generations were the righteous children of Lehi who established the perfect society after the coming of the Lord.

Those people needed the words of Malachi in order to understand the new dimension which the work of the Lord took, now that he had fulfilled his mortal mission. Up to this time most of the preparation had been for his first coming. From that point on, it would be for his second.

The words of Malachi reveal not only key events but also the nature of the work that would prepare for that coming. Therefore, the Savior used the words of Malachi as the basis on which he expounded "all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away" (3 Ne. 26:3).

Further emphasizing the importance of the writings of Malachi was the angel Moroni's use of them. When he instructed Joseph Smith during the night of 21-22 September 1823, he quoted portions of Malachi to introduce the extent and nature of the work which had to be accomplished before the Lord would come in glory. In doing so, he laid the foundation for the work in which the latter-day Church would be engaged. Thus, we see that Malachi's Prophecies were necessary not only for the Nephites but for the Latter-day Saints as well.

The exact dates of Malachi's ministry are not known. From his written work it is clear that the temple had been rebuilt and the ordinances involving animal sacrifice were being performed. This places his ministry after 515 B.C., the year when the temple was dedicated. The abuses he castigated were the among those that the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah were designed to correct. Because those reforms do not appear to have been in effect yet in Malachi's day, it is likely that his writings Precede them. Therefore, his ministry would fall before 458 B.C. and was probably closer to 500 B.C. Malachi's name is unique in the Hebrew cannon. It means is "my messenger," or "my angel," but it may be a shortened form of "the Lord's messenger." Although we know very little about him and his life's history, latter-day revelation makes it clear that he was an important individual who labored with Judah as one of her great prophets (D&C 138:46).

It is Nigh, Even at our Doors

The above fact that no one knows the hour or day of his coming does not answer the question as to why the second coming could not yet be a long way off. Indeed, it only seems to lend more credence to the idea that no one can safely say that the Lord will come soon. However, this is not so. It is important to keep in mind that no date can be set, but there is much evidence that the Lord's coming is near.

In a parable to the disciples, Jesus gave the key for knowing when the great day of his return was near. Said he;

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Matthew 24:32-33

Surely the signs of the times point to the fact that the great and dreadful day is near, even at our doors. The fig tree, figuratively is putting forth her leaves. The turmoil, trouble, the war and the bloodshed that we have seen, and which we still see, all point to the fact that this day for the coming of the Son of God is near.

(Joseph Fielding Smith, Conference Report, April 1948, p 132.)

I know that there are many, and even some among the Latter-day Saints, who are saying just as the Lord said they would say, "The Lord delayeth his coming." (D&C 45:26; 2 Peter 3:3-14) One man said: "It is impossible for Jesus Christ to come inside of three or four hundred years." But I say unto you, Watch.

I do not know when he is going to come. No man knows. Even the angels of heaven are in the dark in regard to that great truth. (Matt. 24:36-37) But this I know, *that the signs that have been pointed out are here.* The earth is full of calamity, of trouble. The hearts of men are failing them. We see the signs as we see the fig tree putting forth her leaves: and knowing this time is near, it behooves me and it behooves you, and all men upon the face of the earth, to *pay heed to the words of Christ, to his apostles and watch,* for we know not the day nor the hour. But I tell you this, it shall come as a thief in the night, when many of us will not be ready for it. *(Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation)*

The Savior Comes Tomorrow

Once, when he was asked if he knew when the Lord's coming would be, President Joseph Fielding Smith gave a startling answer. Said he:

I answered, Yes; and I answer, Yes, now. I know when he will come. *He will come tomorrow.* We have his word for it. Let me read it:

"Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming. *(Now there is a discourse sufficient on tithing.)* For after today cometh the burning-this is speaking after the manner of the Lord -for verily I say, tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of Hosts; and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon." (D&C 64:23-24)

So the Lord is coming, I say, tomorrow. Then let us be prepared. Elder Orson F. Whitney used to write about the Saturday Evening of Time. This is the sixth day now drawing to its close.

When the Lord says it is today until his coming, that, I think is what he has in mind, for he shall come in the morning of the Sabbath, or seventh day of the earth's temporal existence, to inaugurate the millennial reign...

(Joseph Fielding Smith, Conference Report, April 1935, p. 98)

The End is Near

In summary, then, when the question is asked, "How soon the end?" it must immediately be said that no one knows. But the evidence of scripture and the statements of the prophets make it clear that the time is close at hand. People may try to rationalize or explain away the signs which are being fulfilled all around them, but the evidence is still clear. There are many things predicted which have yet to come to pass, but the signs of the times manifest themselves with increasing rapidity.

Orson Pratt said he believed that some people living in 1877 would live to see the temple erected in the city of New Jerusalem. Some would dismiss that since it has been nearly 100 years and there is still no temple in Zion. But it should be remembered that, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that the signs of Christ's birth would come in five years. When the five years were nearly up, many began to scoff and even threatened the believers with death if they did not deny their belief.

"The sign was given on the last night before the five years were finished."

It is true that there are not many people alive today [1971] who were alive when Orson Pratt made his prophecy. But it doesn't take many. It is interesting to note that at the writing of this book, the president of the Church of Jesus Christ, President Joseph Fielding Smith, was alive at the time Orson Pratt spoke this prophecy.

One must be cautious about rejecting the words of the Lord's servants because the full meaning and implications are hidden. President Charles W. Penrose stated the proper attitude most adequately:

Of course, we understand that certain things predicted through the Prophet Joseph Smith are to take place *before this generation shall pass away*, and the Lord will see to it that the generation in which those things were predicted will not all pass away until all shall be fulfilled, but there is no fixed period for a generation, no set time in the revelations of God, no year or date given when these things shall take place, and it is folly for anybody to put a date to it. ***"Leave that in the hands of the Lord and he still take care that his word is fulfilled. . . ."*** (Charles W. Penrose, Conference Report, April 1918, pp.20-21)

The above information was taken from the following sources: Studies in Scripture Volume Four Edited by Kent P. Jackson; The Coming of the Lord By Gerald N. Lund; Journal of Discourses; Old Testament Student Manual

Other ancient historical works, such as the books of the Maccabees from a later century, might well have been included in the Old Testament canon; but since they are not, the testimony of Malachi is its prophetic capstone.

COMMENTARY

1:1–14 I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?

The mode of teaching characteristic of Malachi is to pose a question or make an assertion from the Lord and then give his diagnosis and prescription. In this case the Lord, through Malachi, invoked the well-known history—why Israel (“Jacob”) had been blessed with many blessings whereas Edom had not. Those were the facts behind the shocking rhetoric, “I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau,” attributed to the Lord. That treatment was based not upon favoritism for the individual but upon the principle that blessings result from obedience to God’s laws. Jacob’s blessings were pronounced upon him while he was still unworthy (as is true of many of us), and fulfillment of them came only when he fulfilled the law upon which they were based (BD, “Jacob”). Esau and Edom went another way. The Lord does not exalt people who live even on “the border of wickedness” (Mal. 1:4; TG, “Blessing”; “Obedience”). More specifically to the point, the prophet revealed that through the years the Lord was not content with Israel’s rituals of worship. They did not honor God as either father or master, even offering “polluted bread” and blemished animals as sacrifices.

Malachi tried to teach the Israel of his time the reasonable principles of cause and effect, asking whether they thought God would be gracious to them simply because of who they were. Then he reasoned, when one opens or shuts a door, it is for a purpose; when one kindles a fire on the altar, it is for a reason; just so, one must have a sincere purpose in mind when offering sacrifices and do it righteously or the Lord will neither accept the offerings nor bless the worshipper.

The prophet tried to shock Israel with the future righteousness of converted people of other nations (“the Gentiles”) in contrast

to the heathen. The prophet rebuked the priests for profaning his holy name by offering “contemptible” offerings, all the while protesting that worship was “a weariness.” Among the heathen, said he, the name of the Lord would be more revered than by any Israelite who saved a good animal for himself and sacrificed a blemished one (Mal. 1:11–14). To do so was to show contempt for “the table of the Lord.” In latter days comparable contempt could occur in the perfunctory paying of tithes and offerings, thoughtless sacrament worship, or unthinking performance of temple ordinances.

2:1–10 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you

The Lord had a covenant with Levi, a covenant for life, and a covenant of peace; but it required the Levites’ reverent and dedicated performance of their duties. With the ideal priest, “the law of truth was in his mouth” and he was to act in peace and fairness, so that he might teach and turn many away from sin. He was to be knowledgeable, so that people could learn from his words as a spokesman for the Lord. But the priests had departed from such demeanor and duties, corrupting their covenant and causing many to stumble; therefore, priests had lost their reputation “before all the people” (Mal. 2:6–9).

In conclusion, the prophet taught excellent theology and ethics: we all have one father, even God, and are brothers and sisters; why then would we “deal treacherously” with each other, profaning the covenants that teach us good behavior? This passage is an Old Testament gem of religion and humanity (Mal. 2:10).

2:11–17 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god

The prophet began his lesson on fidelity and commitment by recalling treachery committed in Judah and Israel by those who had “profaned the holiness of the Lord” by marrying “the daughter

of a strange god" by idolatry. He warned that the Lord will "cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar." Weeping and covering the altar of the Lord with tears in false devotion to cover one's aberrations will not gain blessings.

Malachi spoke then of the covenant of Israel with God as if it were a covenant of marriage of a man with the wife of his youth, against whom he has dealt treacherously even though she is his companion and the wife of his covenant. The metaphor reflected both the infidelity of individual men and the apostasy of Israel. But the prophet illustrated the latter point more poignantly by details of the marriage covenant and commitment. The translation is difficult, but it could be rendered from the Hebrew thus: "And not one hath done so who had a remnant of the Spirit! For what one, seeking a godly seed, if ye take heed in your spirit, would deal treacherously with the wife of your youth?" (Mal. 2:15). Then he declared that the Lord himself "hateth putting away." The assertion that one guilty of infidelity "covereth violence with his garment" and the admonition to "take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" are applicable in all latter-day marriages, and especially in temple marriages (Mal. 2:16).

It is a masterpiece of understatement to assert that one has "wearied the Lord" who says, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17) To say so is to question the justice of God and question his caring—or even his existence.

3:1–6 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple *Who are the Sons of Levi?*

As is evident from the many cross-references to the verses of this segment of Malachi's prophecies, a messenger prepared the way for the coming of the Lord in both his first advent and his anticipated second advent. But it is also evident that it will be in his second advent that the Messiah's coming will be as a refiner's fire, to "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver," so that they may function again at the altars and their offerings will be acceptable to the Lord (Mal. 3:3; D&C 13; 84:33–34; 124:39;

128:24). The Judgment before the Millennium will condemn sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, and oppressors of hirelings, widows, and orphans. Only spiritually true sons of Jacob, the "seed of Abraham" either by birth or by conversion (Abr. 2:10) will not be consumed, for the Lord will not change his standards.

3:7–18 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts

First among the exhibits of ways Israel had not kept the covenants was their "robbing" God of tithes and offerings. The method of teaching Malachi used should have shocked even the guilty. The generous promises, on the other hand, should have impressed them—and us—to repent and tithe honestly (Mal. 3:7–12).

The second charge was also serious: they had doubted God's justice because they had kept the ordinances and claimed to have walked soberly and humbly before the Lord, but they observed that the proud seem happy, the wicked prosper, and they that test God seem to get away with it (Mal. 3:13–15; cf. 2:17). For the truly humble and faithful among them, there was reassurance as they comforted each other, for the prophet taught them about a "book of remembrance" in which the deeds of the righteous are recorded. They shall be part of the Lord's royal treasure and be saved; the same Hebrew word rendered *jewels* here is also rendered *peculiar treasure* (cf. Ex. 19:5 and commentary). Thus, though injustices appear in this world, justice with due rewards and punishment will come later (Mal. 3:16–18 and fn.).

4:1–6 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up

The topic of the last part of the foregoing chapter is continued with a terrible forecast of the fate of the wicked at the end of the wicked world (Mal. 4:1 and fn.).

When the Lord reigns on earth, all who revere and serve him will go forth under his watchful care. The "Sun of righteousness"