

Malachi

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Author: Malachi · Written: c. 450-400 BC · Category: Minor Prophets

Introduction

Malachi closes the Old Testament canon with a series of six disputations between the LORD of hosts and a spiritually numb community. A century has passed since the exile ended; the temple functions, sacrifices occur, and yet the glory promised by Haggai and Zechariah seems delayed. Priests go through the motions while offering defiled animals, men discard the wives of their youth, merchants curse the tithe, and ordinary Israelites murmur that serving God is useless. Into this malaise God raises a prophet whose very name means 'my messenger'—a living reminder that covenant speech has not gone silent even when devotion has grown cold.

The book reads like a courtroom transcript shaped by sovereign grace. Each section begins with a divine assertion ("I have loved you"), moves to Israel's cynical cross-examination ("Wherein hast thou loved us?"), and ends with God's conclusive rebuttal. The opening dispute reaches back to Jacob and Esau, pressing the doctrine of electing love: God's affection is not merely sentimental but covenantal, rooted in His free choice rather than Israel's merit. That same sovereign love preserves a remnant, records their names in a book of remembrance, and guarantees that the faithful will be treasured as God's "jewels" when He makes up His peculiar possession. Malachi exposes the depravity of the human heart while magnifying a God who remains just and the justifier of those who fear His name.

Because God does not change, His purposes cannot fail. Malachi therefore looks forward as much as it looks within. A messenger in the spirit of Elijah will prepare the way; the Lord Himself will suddenly enter His temple to purify priests, refine worship, and judge covenant-breakers. The "Sun of righteousness" will rise with healing wings for those who revere Him, while the arrogant will be stubble before the coming day. After Malachi, four centuries of prophetic silence will descend until John the Baptist's cry shatters the hush. By the time the New Testament opens, these disputations will still be echoing—calling a new generation to repent, trust the sovereign grace that chose them, and await the faithful One who will bear the curse on their behalf.

Book Outline

- **God's Love Declared and Israel's Doubt** (1:1-5) — Oracle introduction and affirmation of God's covenant love contrasted with Edom's desolation.
- **Corrupt Priests and Defiled Offerings** (1:6-2:9) — Charges against priests who treat God's altar with contempt and break the covenant with Levi.
- **Faithless People and Marital Unfaithfulness** (2:10-16) — Condemnation of mixed marriages and easy divorce that profanes God's covenant.
- **Questioning God's Justice and Promise of the Messenger** (2:17-3:5) — People ask, 'Where is the God of judgment?' God replies that His messenger will come to purify and judge.
- **Call to Return through Tithing and Trust** (3:6-12) — Because the LORD does not change, the people are not consumed. They must stop robbing God and experience His blessing.
- **Remnant Encouraged and Day of the LORD** (3:13-4:6) — Scoffers are rebuked, the faithful are remembered, and the coming Day will burn the proud while healing the righteous. Elijah will come first to turn hearts.

Key Themes

- **God's Covenant Love and the People's Doubt:** The book opens with God's declaration of love (1:2). Israel's cynical response ('Wherein hast thou loved us?') exposes hearts hardened by disappointment.
- **Corrupt Worship and Priestly Failure:** Priests offer blind and lame sacrifices, profane God's name, and cause many to stumble (1:6-2:9). Malachi calls them back to covenant fidelity.
- **Faithlessness in Relationships:** Men divorce covenant wives and marry idolatrous women, violating God's design for marriage (2:10-16).
- **Robbing God and Testing His Faithfulness:** Withheld tithes reveal distrust. God invites the people to 'prove' Him and see if He will open the windows of heaven (3:6-12).
- **The Coming Messenger and Day of the LORD:** A messenger will prepare the way, the Lord will purify His people, and the great and dreadful day will bring judgment for the proud and healing for those who fear His name (3:1-4:6).
- **Remnant Faithfulness and God's Book of Remembrance:** Even amid cynicism, some fear the LORD. God listens to their conversations and writes their names in His book, promising distinction between righteous and wicked (3:16-18).

Key Verses

I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,

— Malachi 1:2 (Covenant love, rooted in God's sovereign choice, anchors the entire prophetic confrontation.)

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, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

— Malachi 3:1 (This prophecy points to John the Baptist and to the Lord Himself entering His temple, setting the stage for the New Testament.)

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

— Malachi 3:10 (God links obedience and trust with His abundant provision, inviting Israel to test His generosity.)

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.

— Malachi 3:16-17 (Even in a compromised community, God treasures those who revere Him and promises to publicly vindicate them.)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

— Malachi 4:5-6 (The Old Testament ends with expectation: Elijah will return to spark repentance before the Day of the LORD. The New Testament begins with this promise fulfilled.)

Historical Context

Malachi likely prophesied during or shortly after Nehemiah's reforms (mid-fifth century BC). Persian rule continued, priests had become complacent, and the populace suffered economic hardship. With hopes for Davidic glory delayed, many concluded serving God was futile. Malachi confronts this cynicism head-on.

Literary Style

Each disputation follows a pattern: God's assertion, the people's skeptical question, and God's rebuttal with evidence and promise. The rhetoric is sharp, sometimes sarcastic, yet laced with tenderness toward those who fear the LORD. Malachi blends prophetic judgment with wisdom-like reflection on everyday behavior.

Theological Significance

Malachi affirms God's unchanging character ('I am the LORD, I change not') and His covenant loyalty despite human infidelity. It highlights worship integrity, covenant marriage, faithful stewardship, and communal repentance. The promise of Elijah and the sudden coming of the Lord frame redemptive history between the old covenant and the dawning of the Messiah.

Christ in Malachi

Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the messenger and the promised 'Elijah' (Matthew 11:10-14). Christ Himself is the Lord who comes to His temple, purifying worship and offering the healing beams of righteousness. Ultimately He bears the curse threatened at the book's close so that repentant people receive blessing.

Relationship to the New Testament

Malachi provides the script for the opening of the Gospels. Gabriel quotes 3:1 when announcing John (Luke 1:17). Jesus and the disciples cite 4:5-6 to explain John the Baptist's ministry (Matthew 11; 17). The themes of pure worship, faithful giving, and covenant marriage echo throughout the New Testament epistles (1 Corinthians 11, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Hebrews 13).

Practical Application

God expects wholehearted devotion, not half-hearted religion. Malachi challenges believers to honor God with their best, remain faithful in marriage, give generously, speak well of God, and live in reverent expectation of Christ's appearing. Those who fear the LORD even in spiritually dry seasons can know that their names are written in His book and that the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing.

Chapter 1

The Lord's Love for Israel

1 The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

2 I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,

3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.

5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

Defiled Offerings

6 A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

7 Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.

8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.

9 And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.

10 Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.

13 Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.

14 But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

Chapter 2

Warning to the Priests

- 1 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.
 - 2 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, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.
 - 3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.
 - 4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.
 - 5 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 before my name.
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- 6 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.
 - 7 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.
 - 8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.
 - 9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.
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Judah's Unfaithfulness

- 10 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?
- 11 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.
- 12 The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.
- 13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.

14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, 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?

Chapter 3

The Messenger of the Covenant

1 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, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope:

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Robbing God

6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

7 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. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

The Book of Remembrance

13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

Chapter 4

The Day of the Lord

1 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, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

Remember the Law of Moses

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.