

Malachi 1
November 8, 2020

Open with Prayer

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

We know very little about this next to the last of the OT prophets. What we do know is that the name “Malachi” means “My Messenger.” We also know that Malachi ministered to the restored Jewish nation about 400 years before Christ. Another way to give this historical context is that Malachi’s writing is About 100 Years After the Jews (approx. 50K) had returned to Jerusalem from 70 years Exile in Babylon (538BC).

Malachi will point out the terrible sins of the people and the priests in the form of **oracles**. The Hebrew word behind “oracle” really means “a burden, or a load.” Consequently, Malachi is creating a sense of anxiety and foreboding. The mood is somber. He is addressing the Israelites, the restored Jewish nation who are now back in Jerusalem after 70 years of being exiled in Babylon. Since the oracle is addressed **to Israel**, the burden of this discourse concerns problems in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. And since Yahweh is always the faithful, loyal, covenant-keeping God, trouble in the covenant relationship can only be because of *Israel’s* unfaithfulness. And because the Israelites are the only ones to blame, it makes this text uncomfortable.

So to get us primed for today’s text....

HOOK:

Q: Let’s suppose that unbeknownst to Mark Kolb, a minor prophet named Malachi, got a hold of the Zoom link for today and said the following:

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty. **How would you answer?!**

Transition: Sometimes we forget that God has expectations of being loved back by His children. In today’s text, we’ll learn how both the people and the priests were failing God. I think our task is to honestly answer the same questions posed to the Israelites and assess where we might need to make changes in our own life to faithfully honor God. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Setting a Sober Mood-A Sense of Anxiety and Foreboding

1 An oracle (*maśśā’* (“burden”)): The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi (means “my messenger”)

Jacob Loved, Esau Hated

² “I have loved you (**Audience = Israel!!- not all people in general**),” says the LORD.
“But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

⁴ Edom (Esau’s descendants) may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.”

But this is what the LORD Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. ⁵ You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!’

Blemished Sacrifices

⁶ “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty. “It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’

⁷ “You place defiled food on my altar.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’

“By saying that the LORD’s table (most likely the altar of burnt offerings) is contemptible. ⁸ When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty.

⁹ “Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?”—says the LORD Almighty.

¹⁰ “Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands. ¹¹ My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.

¹² “But you profane it by saying of the Lord’s table, ‘It is defiled,’ and of its food, ‘It is contemptible.’ ¹³ And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” says the LORD Almighty.

“When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” says the LORD. ¹⁴ “Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king,” says the LORD Almighty, “and my name is to be feared among the nations.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

The words **I have loved you** are not a general statement about God’s love for all people. The God of *Israel* was speaking: He is the One who called her into existence and who ruled over her and raised her (cf. v. 6) for more than 1,000 years on the basis of His covenant with her. And she was the object of His love (v. 2c).

The Hebrew words for **loved** and **hated** refer not to God's emotions, but to His choice of one over the other for a covenant relationship (cf. Gen. 29:31–35; Deut. 21:15, 17; Luke 14:26). To hate someone meant to reject him and to disavow any loving association with him (cf. Ps. 139:21). Nor do these words by themselves indicate the eternal destinations of Jacob and Esau. The verbs refer to God's acts in history toward both of the two nations which descended from the two brothers.

The word "hate" in the Bible does not always carry the same sense of antipathy and disgust associated with the English expression; it can mean simply to favor someone else with special privilege or devotion. In that sense, the Lord's "hatred" of Esau was only the other side of His loyalty to His covenant with Israel.

Q: What do we learn about God (Yahweh) in this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

- It is a dangerous thing when people argue with God and try to defend their sinful ways
- Doubting God's love is the beginning of unbelief and disobedience. Satan wants us to feel neglected by God.
- The priests did not value the spiritual privileges that God had given them. They did not bring their best sacrifices to them. They were extremely insensitive to their sin and how it showed that they were despising God. Given that we are a part of His royal priesthood, are we slipping into a state of spiritual apathy or indifference? Are we being insensitive?
- The principle of bringing the best to the Lord is still required!
- Honor and respect are still due the Lord, and He still desires that those who worship Him do so by dedicating themselves entirely to Him.
- Believers today would do well to consider all they have as a stewardship responsibility from the Lord, asking Him what He would have them do with what He has given.
- Religious activity performed without genuine love and gratitude to God is not only useless but repulsive to Him because it slanders His character.

LOOK:

We are priests through Christ, and we too are to bring "spiritual sacrifices" to Him (1 Peter 2:5). What are these sacrifices? Our bodies (Rom. 12:1–2); our offerings (Phil. 4:14–18); praise (Heb. 13:15); good works (Heb. 13:16); souls we have won to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Are we bringing Him our best—or only what is convenient for us?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Mal). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

We know very little about this next to the last of the OT prophets (John the Baptist was the last—Mal. 3:1 and 4:5–6 with Matt. 11:10–15, Mark 1:2, and Luke 1:17). He ministered to the restored Jewish nation about 400 years before Christ. The sins described in this book are found in Neh. 13:10–30. Malachi directs his first message to the priests, and then he turns to the people collectively—“Like people, like priest.” As the prophet delivers God’s Word, the people respond by arguing. Note the repeated “Wherein?” (1:2, 6–7; 2:17; 3:7–8, 13). It is a dangerous thing when people argue with God and try to defend their sinful ways.

Malachi points out the terrible sins of the people and the priests.

I. They Doubted His Love (1:1–5)

“I have loved you,” God says to His people. “Oh?” they respond. “Wherein have You loved us? Prove it.” Doubting God’s love is the beginning of unbelief and disobedience. Eve doubted God’s love and ate of the forbidden tree; she thought God was holding out on her. Satan wants us to feel neglected by God. “Look at your difficult circumstances,” he said to the Jewish remnant. “Where are the crops? Why doesn’t God take care of you?”

God proves His love to His people in two ways: (1) He graciously chose Jacob, their father, and rejected Esau, who in many ways was a much better man; and (2) He judged the Edomites (Esau’s descendants) and gave to Israel the best of the lands. He promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, but, alas, their sins polluted the land. Even then, he graciously restored them to their land and delivered them from captivity.

II. They Despised His Name (1:6–14)

Now God turns to the priests, who should have been the spiritual leaders of the land. The priests were not giving honor to God’s name; they were taking the best for themselves. They did not value the spiritual privileges God gave them: serving at the altar, burning the incense, and eating the dedicated showbread. And they did not bring their best for the sacrifices: they brought the poorest of the animals (cf. Deut. 15:21). God gave them His very best, and He asked for their best in return, but they would not obey Him.

Verse 10 ought to read: “Who is there spiritual enough to shut the temple doors and put an end to this hypocrisy?” God would rather see the temple closed than to have the people and the priests “playing at religion” and keeping the best for themselves. The priests would not even accept a sacrifice until they had first gotten their share. It was this kind of sin that brought defeat to Israel back in Eli’s day (1 Sam. 2:12–17 and 4:1–18). Verse 11 states that the “heathen Gentiles” were offering better sacrifices to the Lord than were His own people. It is too bad when unsaved people sacrifice more for their religion than do those of us who truly know the Lord.

We are priests through Christ, and we too are to bring “spiritual sacrifices” to Him (1 Peter 2:5). What are these sacrifices? Our bodies (Rom. 12:1–2); our offerings (Phil. 4:14–18); praise (Heb. 13:15); good works (Heb. 13:16); souls we have won to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Are we bringing Him our best—or only what is convenient for us?

I. Introduction: The Burden of Malachi (1:1)

1:1. The word *maśśā'* ("burden"), with which the book begins, sets a sober mood. The translates this word **An oracle**. In the prophetic books *maśśā'* introduces messages of a threatening nature 27 times (e.g., Isa. 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; Nahum 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1; 12:1). (See comments on *maśśā'* at Zech. 9:1–8.) Standing alone at the beginning of Malachi, the word *maśśā'* gives this prophet's entire message a sense of anxiety and foreboding.

The phrase **the word of the LORD** frequently appears as an introduction to a prophecy, to identify it as a revelation from God that carries His authority. "The LORD" (*Yahweh*) is of course the name of God which recalls His association with the covenant He made with Israel at Sinai. Since the word is addressed to **Israel**, the burden of this discourse concerns problems in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. And since Yahweh is the faithful, loyal, covenant-keeping God, trouble in the covenant relationship can only be because of *Israel's* unfaithfulness. The fact that this burden from the Lord came **through Malachi** must have heightened the sense of imminent rebuke in the minds of the original readers. The priests were supposed to be God's messengers (cf. Mal. 2:7), but now *they* were to listen to one whose name means "My messenger."

II. First Oracle: Respond to God's Love (1:2–5)

People who read these verses today may feel a little uncomfortable and yet somewhat fascinated, like one who is in the presence of an intensely personal conversation between two parties who have long known each other. By introducing the prophecy as a burden (v. 1) Malachi had already prepared his readers to anticipate accusation and rebuke. However, this first oracle begins not with a charge of wrongdoing but with a claim of God's unrequited love.

A. *The claim of God's love for Israel (1:2a)*

1:2a. The words **I have loved you** are not a general statement about God's love for all people. The God of *Israel* was speaking: He is the One who called her into existence and who ruled over her and raised her (cf. v. 6) for more than 1,000 years on the basis of His covenant with her. And she was the object of His love (v. 2c).

Considerable pathos is in the words, "I have loved you." This was not the first time **the LORD** had said this. One is reminded of Hosea 11:1, 3–4, 8–9, and God's tender words in Isaiah 43:4. But His love for Israel antedated her existence; He loved her in that He sovereignly and graciously elected her (Israel) to be His own possession. This was clearly revealed at the time He gave the covenant (Deut. 4:37; 5:10; 7:6–9). Love was the heart of this covenant relationship. This is clear from the exhortations that follow these declarations of divine love (Deut. 4:39–40; 7:9–15). Acknowledging God's love for her, Israel should have responded by loving Him and obeying His commands (Deut. 6:4–9).

B. *Israel's question of the claim (1:2b)*

1:2b. Israel asked God, **How have You loved us?** (Cf. Israel's similar questioning in vv. 6–7; 2:17; 3:7–8, 13.) By questioning God's claim, Israel was betraying a distrust of God, a lack of faith in His Word—not only a lack of trust in Malachi's statement (1:2a) but also a distrust of God's faithfulness to His covenant. Israel's failure to believe God's Word caused her to fail to love Him and also caused her to be hostile toward Him.

Perhaps Israel thought her complaint was legitimate. After all, about 100 years had passed since the people had returned from the Exile; yet the kingdom predicted by God's prophets had still not come. Instead the people continued to be dominated by foreign governors (v. 8) and experienced hard times economically (2:2; 3:9, 11). If they had carefully read the covenant in Deuteronomy they would have known that such misfortunes were the *result*—not the *cause*—of their disobedience. While Malachi later indicated that a righteous remnant, which feared God, did exist at that time (3:16–18), the nation as a whole needed to repent from the sin of unbelief and fall in love wholeheartedly with the Lord.

C. The vindication of God's claim (1:2c–5)

1. THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL OVER EDOM (1:2c–3a)

1:2c–3a. The Lord's claim over Israel was vindicated by two considerations. First was His love expressed in His free choice, His election of **Jacob** and his descendants (including this generation which had questioned Him) to inherit the promise. This was contrary to the normal practice of choosing the oldest son. **Esau**, also named Edom and the father of the Edomites (Gen. 36:1), was the firstborn of the twins. Yet even before birth God freely elected Jacob, later named Israel, as the heir (Gen. 25:21–34; Rom. 9:10–13). The Hebrew words for **loved** and **hated** refer not to God's emotions but to His choice of one over the other for a covenant relationship (cf. Gen. 29:31–35; Deut. 21:15, 17; Luke 14:26). To hate someone meant to reject him and to disavow any loving association with him (cf. Ps. 139:21). Nor do these words by themselves indicate the eternal destinations of Jacob and Esau. The verbs refer to God's acts in history toward both of the two nations which descended from the two brothers.

2. THE JUDGMENT OF EDOM (1:3b–5)

1:3b–4a. The verbs “I have loved” and “I have hated” (vv. 2b–3a) are in the perfect tense and therefore express not only God's past relationship with Israel and Edom but also His historical and present dealings (in Malachi's day) with these peoples. This provided the second consideration which vindicated God's claim. Israel needed to consider what her lot would have been if she, like Edom, had not been elected to a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Both Israel and Edom received judgment from God at the hands of the Babylonians in the sixth century (Jer. 27:2–8). Yet God repeatedly promised to restore Israel (because of His covenant promises, Deut. 4:29–31; 30:1–10), but He condemned Edom to complete destruction, never to be restored (Jer. 49:7–22; Ezek. 35).

Thus, the Lord **turned** Edom's **mountains into a wasteland** and only **the desert jackals** would have that land to pass on to their “descendants.” Even Edom's greatest efforts to **rebuild** its **ruins** would be frustrated by **the LORD Almighty** (a title Malachi used 24 times in his short book). In the fifth century, the Nabateans, an Arabian tribe, occupied Edom (located south and east of Judea) and forced the Edomites westward into a desert area later known as Idumea. In the fourth century, the Nabateans took over Idumea as well.

1:4b–5. **The Wicked Land** contrasts with “the holy land” (Zech. 2:12) so that Israel’s borders were also the borders of blessing. On the one side was Israel whom God loved and chose to set apart (“holy” means set apart) for covenant blessings. On the other side was Edom whom God had not chosen. Rather she would be destroyed by Him in His **wrath**. (On Edom’s wickedness, see Obad. 8–14.) Israel, seeing God’s sovereign dealings with Edom, would have a better understanding not only of God’s love for her, but also of His greatness over all the earth: **Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!**

III. Second Oracle: Honor God (1:6–2:9)

The first oracle ended with a statement about God’s greatness both in and beyond Israel. In sharp contrast the second oracle addressed Israel’s failure to honor God properly. Since Israel was supposed to love God wholeheartedly (Deut. 6:5) and to fear Him (Deut. 6:3), the seriousness of her condition was clear.

A. *The charge of disrespect (1:6a)*

1:6a. Malachi spoke of proper relationships in society, relationships Israel certainly would have insisted on. **A son honors his father, and a servant his master.** The question follows, Which set of relationships would Israel have considered comparable to her relationship with the Lord? Some Israelites might have suggested that God was like a father to Israel, for this analogy had been used before (Ex. 4:22; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Hosea 11:1). The fifth of the Ten Commandments states that children are to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Disobedient children who rebelled against discipline were to be stoned (Deut. 21:18–21).

Therefore, should the nation which considered itself a “son” of the Lord be less obedient? So God’s question was sharply presented, **If I am a Father, where is the honor or glory due Me?** (Cf. Isa. 1:2.) The Hebrew word for “honor” (*kābôd*) also means “glory.” The glory of God is spoken of frequently throughout the Scriptures (He is even called “the King of glory,” Ps. 24:7–10), and the fact that glory and honor are due Him is beyond dispute.

Perhaps some Israelites might consider the Lord the Master of Israel. Certainly Scripture presents Israel as the Lord’s servant (Isa. 44:1–2). Therefore, how could the nation that was the Lord’s servant be disrespectful to Him? The Lord’s second question was ominous, **If I am a Master, where is the respect due Me?** The word “respect” may also be translated “fear.” There is no contradiction between the admonition to love God (implied in the first oracle, Mal. 1:2–5) and the exhortation to fear Him. Both appear together in the covenant (cf. Deut. 6:5 with Deut. 6:13). Fear of God does not mean being terrified of Him; it means a proper respect and reverence for Him, a reverence that leads to worship and obedience.

It is you, O priests, who despise My name. This charge is doubly sad because after the return from the Exile, the priests were responsible to teach the people God’s covenant and turn their hearts to God (Neh. 9:38–10:39; cf. Ezra 6:16–22; 7:10). If the *priests* failed to honor God, what could be expected of the people? The words “My name” stand for God Himself. (In Mal., reference to God’s “name” occurs 10 times: 1:6 [twice], 11 [thrice], 14; 2:2, 5; 3:16; 4:2.) They despised *Him*, the One who is **the LORD Almighty**.

B. *Israel’s question of the charge (1:6b)*

1:6b. Malachi cast the priests in the rhetorical role of questioning God: **How have we despised Your name?** From the specific nature of the charge that follows (vv. 7–14), the priests were extremely insensitive to their sin, seemingly—and surprisingly—unaware that they had despised God.

C. The proof of God's charge: Contemptible sacrifices (1:7–14)

1:7. The Lord's reference to **defiled food** should have been enough to cause the priests to repent. They had specific instructions on what constituted defective sacrifices (Lev. 22:17–30). They were warned against offering such sacrifices lest the priests thereby profane and defile God's name (Lev. 22:2, 32). Yet the priests were guilty of that very sin—despising His name (Mal. 1:6) by offering “defiled food” (v. 7). But why did Malachi call the sacrifices “food”? Because all the offerings were called “the food of . . . God” (Lev. 21:6).

The priests asked, **How have we defiled You?** They did not say “We have not defiled You,” for they could not really plead ignorance of the Law. So they asked *how* they had profaned the Lord. The fact that they saw the charge of improper sacrifices as a defilement of God Himself showed that they were familiar with Leviticus 22:2, 32. Apparently they had become so hardened and had so rationalized their sin that Malachi could portray them as daring God to spell out their wrongs.

Malachi answered that they had defiled God **by saying that the LORD's table is contemptible**. Malachi 1:7, 12 are the only two verses in the Old Testament where the phrase “the LORD's table” is found. It probably does not refer to the table on which the bread of the Presence was placed (Ex. 25:23–30; 1 Kings 7:48; 2 Chron. 13:10–11). Possibly it refers to the altar of burnt offering (cf. Ex. 38:1; 40:6) because Malachi had already mentioned it (Mal. 1:7) and he spoke of animal sacrifices (v. 8). Or the table may refer metaphorically to the whole spread of offerings sacrificed on the altar (cf. Ezek. 44:15–16).

The charge that the priests were calling the Lord's table contemptible was substantiated by their actions (Mal. 1:8). They were treating it with contempt by disregarding God's requirements concerning the kinds of sacrifices that should be placed on it. This made them guilty, deserving of death (Lev. 22:9). Also, their contempt was deepened as they ate some of those unacceptable sacrifices (the priests received their food from the offerings, Lev. 24:5–9).

1:8–10. Malachi pointed out that the priests brought **blind animals** and **crippled** and **diseased animals** as sacrifices (cf. v. 13). He asked if **that** was **wrong**. Their answer, according to Leviticus 22:18–25 and Deuteronomy 15:21, should have been yes. It was to their shame that these things had to be pointed out to them. Ironically Malachi suggested, **Try offering them to your governor!** The governor's “table” was a lavishly prepared banquet (cf. Neh. 5:17) including “offerings” from the people. Certainly the governor (*pehâh*, a Persian title) would not have been **pleased with** the meat of blind, crippled, or diseased animals; in fact he would not have accepted it. How much more absurd it was to expect the favor of **the LORD Almighty** (cf. Mal. 1:4) with such offerings. He did not accept such sacrifices, nor did He **accept** (vv. 8–9) the priests. To emphasize this point, Malachi said the whole **temple** service might as well be **shut** down. It was even useless to light the **fires on** the **altar** of burnt offering. God was **not pleased**; He would **accept** no **offerings from** them.

1:11. In the Hebrew, this verse begins with *kî* (“for, because”), not translated in the NIV. It indicates that what follows is the reason the Lord refused to accept the priests' offerings (v. 10). Scholars differ on whether the Hebrew passive participle *mūggās* should be rendered **will be brought** (future tense, KJV, NASB, NIV, or “is brought” (present tense like RSV and many

commentaries). If the present tense is followed, then Malachi was referring to practices in his day. In that case the offerings refer either to those brought by Jews who were still dispersed among the nations or to offerings made by Gentiles. The first of these is rejected because the phrases **from the rising to the setting of the sun** and **in every place** indicate a practice more universal than the limited extent of the Jewish dispersion. Also the sacrifices given by Jews in the Dispersion could not be called **pure offerings** since they could be made only in Jerusalem. (Furthermore, there is no evidence that Jews in the Dispersion offered any sacrifices.)

Those who accept a present-tense rendering of the verb *mūggāš* usually choose the second of the options just described. In this view God was endorsing pagan worship. However, this view must be rejected for several reasons. If it were adopted, it would be the only place in the Bible where pagan worship is considered legitimate, which would directly contradict numerous references that specifically condemn such worship (e.g., Ex. 23:24, 32–33; Deut. 13:6–11; 29:17; 1 Kings 18:19–46; Ps. 96:5; Isa. 48:5; 66:3; Hab. 2:18–20). Not even Paul’s reference to the Athenian worship of an unknown god (Acts 17:22–31) supports this interpretation that pagans worship God’s “name” with “pure offerings.” Also such an interpretation does not accord with the rest of Malachi, which strongly emphasizes strict obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

Taking *mūggāš* as future (“will be brought”), however, corresponds with other Old Testament prophecies and with the Book of Malachi itself. The prophets predicted a time when Gentiles will see the light and become worshipers of the Lord (Isa. 45:22–25; 49:5–7; 59:19). The Messiah will become King over the entire earth. Believers in all nations will worship Him (Isa. 11:3–4, 9; Dan. 7:13–14, 27–28; Zeph. 2:11; 3:8–11; Zech. 14:9, 16). Malachi also spoke of the coming of the future day when the Lord will return and will bring about pure worship in Israel (Mal. 3:1–4). It seems preferable then to associate the “pure” Gentile worship mentioned in 1:11 with Israel’s pure worship. But will Gentiles in the kingdom give offerings “in every place”? No. This problem is alleviated if the preposition *be* (usually meaning “in”) before “every place” is rendered “from,” as in Isaiah 21:1 (cf. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

1:12–13. After speaking of the pure offerings in the future kingdom (v. 11), Malachi referred again to the immediate condition of the priests in his day. He repeated the charge that they were profaning God’s name (cf. v. 6). In verses 7–8 the *actions* of the priests were condemned; here their *attitude* was condemned. Their attitude was one of contempt. Apparently the priests recognized that these sacrificial practices were irregular, for they said that **the LORD’s table** (cf. v. 7) **is defiled** and that **its food ... is contemptible**. But they did not care to take the trouble to set things straight. Being involved in offering the sacrifices was just **a burden**. Such a response was a form of contempt (cf. James 4:17).

That the priests brought unacceptable **animals** was repeated in Malachi 1:13 (cf. v. 8), and God’s refusal to **accept them** was repeated from verses 8–10.

1:14. Here Malachi moved from speaking of sacrifices in general to discussing the payment of vows. Making a vow to the Lord was not mandatory, but if a person did so he was required to pay it (Deut. 23:21–23). Moses (Lev. 22:17–25) gave the priests specific instructions about the kinds of sacrifices acceptable for payments of vows. The vow to give an **acceptable** animal and then bring **a blemished animal** was wrong. Certainly no one would try to cheat a king or governor, for fear of being reprimanded and punished by that authority. Nor should one try to cheat the **great King**, the One whose **name is to be feared among the nations**. Malachi 1 ends by emphasizing God’s supreme authority.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1393-1394). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

AUTHOR

The prophet Malachi's name means "my messenger," and some have wondered whether that was his real name or a title. For example, "My messenger" in 3:1 has the same Hebrew form as the name Malachi. Additionally, the phrases "the messenger of the LORD of Hosts" (2:7) and "the Messenger of the covenant" (3:1) are related to Malachi's name. The emphasis of the book is clearly on the message rather than the messenger, since 47 of the book's 55 verses are personal addresses from the Lord. An ancient Jewish tradition identifies Malachi with Ezra, but this seems improbable. Since all the other writing prophets are named in the heading to their book, it seems best to take Malachi as the prophet's name.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MALACHI

Malachi could have written his book anytime between about 500–400 B.C. The earlier date is the approximate time for the fall of Edom (Esau), which Malachi referred to as in the past (1:2–4). The later date is about the time that Nehemiah's ministry ended and when the last part of the OT was written. Certain issues that Malachi treated were also treated by Ezra and Nehemiah, leading to the conclusion that Malachi was likely written between 450–400 B.C. These include the problems of mixed marriages (Ezr 9–10; Neh 10:30; 13:23–27; Mal 2:11), corrupt priests (Neh 13:4–9; Mal 1:6–2:9), and the failure of people to pay their tithes (Neh 13:10–13; Mal 3:5–10).

THE MEANING OF MALACHI'S MESSAGE

Malachi contrasted the faithfulness of the Lord with the faithlessness of Israel. The Lord had always loved Israel, still loved Israel, and would always love His people. In return, the Lord expected the honor due to a father from a child or the respect due to a master from a slave. The Israelites had failed to honor God, choosing instead to participate in disrespectful worship practices and to oppress their fellow Israelites. The Lord would deal with these issues by judging the guilty and blessing the repentant. He would purify His people, removing those who persisted in disobedience and leaving behind a righteous remnant.

While animal sacrifices and tithes are concerns more of the OT than of the NT, the principle of bringing the best to the Lord still abides. Honor and respect are still due the Lord, and He still desires that those who worship Him do so by dedicating themselves entirely to Him. The tithe was a way to carry out in an economic way the wholehearted love of God and the love of neighbor as oneself (Lv 19:18; Dt 6:4–9). Believers today would do well to consider all they have as a stewardship responsibility from the Lord, asking Him what He would have them do with what He has given.

1:2–5 Malachi begins with a reference to the long-standing tension between Israel and Edom, the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau who despised his birthright and held the promises of God in contempt (Gn 25:29–34). Moses admonished the Israelites, "Do not despise an Edomite" (Dt 23:7) because Esau was the brother of Jacob. But the Edomites continued to believe the Israelites had taken the land of Canaan by deception. They cooperated with the Assyrian invasion of Judah, and when the Judeans were taken into exile they claimed the land for themselves. For

these reasons they came under the Lord's judgment (see Ezk 35:5–15; 36:1–15). When the Judean exiles returned to the region of Jerusalem the Edomites further opposed them. In this situation Malachi heard the Lord saying, "I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau" (vv. 2–3).

The word "hate" in the Bible does not always carry the same sense of antipathy and disgust associated with the English expression; it can mean simply to favor someone else with special privilege or devotion. In that sense, the Lord's "hatred" of Esau was only the other side of His loyalty to His covenant with Israel. Paul quoted verses 2–3 with that meaning in Rm 9:13 as an illustration of the Lord's mercy and compassion on whomever He chooses to bestow them (Rm 9:15). Nevertheless, in the circumstances of the Jews' return from exile, the hostility of the Edomites seems to have reached another level, provoking Malachi to call them "the people the LORD has cursed forever" (v. 4).

Clendenen, E. R. (1998). The Minor Prophets. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman concise Bible commentary (pp. 391–393). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Malachi is the last prophetic message from God before the close of the Old Testament period, providing a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament and a transition for understanding the kingdom proclamation in the New Testament. It is probably no accident that the one prophesied in Malachi 3:1 to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming to His temple is identified as "My messenger," a word identical in Hebrew to the name of the book's author given in 1:1. It may be that the prophet Malachi and his earliest readers considered that He and this book constituted a preliminary fulfillment of this prophecy.

Nothing is known about the author other than his name. The book emphasizes the message rather than the messenger, since out of a total of fifty-five verses as many as forty-seven are the personal addresses of the Lord.

Although the book is not dated by a reference to a ruler or a specific event, internal evidence, as well as its position in the canon, favors a postexilic date. Reference to a governor in 1:8 favors the Persian period, when Judah was a province or subprovince of the Persian satrapy Abar Nahara, a territory that included Palestine, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and, until 485 B.C., Babylon. The temple had been rebuilt (515 B.C.) and worship established (1:6–11; 2:1–3; 3:1, 10). But the excitement and enthusiasm for which the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were the catalysts had waned. The social and religious problems Malachi addressed reflect the situation portrayed in Ezra 9 and 10 and Nehemiah 5 and 13, suggesting dates either just before Ezra's return (around 460 B.C.) or just before Nehemiah's second term as governor (Neh. 13:6, 7; around 435 B.C.).

Message and Purpose

Indictment: Malachi presents Judah's sins largely on the people's own lips, quoting their words, thoughts, and attitudes (1:2, 6, 7, 12–13; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13–15). Malachi was faced with the failure of the priests of Judah to fear the Lord and to serve the people conscientiously during difficult times. This neglect had contributed to Judah's indifference toward the will of God. Blaming their economic and social troubles on the Lord's supposed unfaithfulness to them, the people were treating one another faithlessly (especially their wives) and were profaning the temple by marrying pagan women. They were also withholding their tithes from the temple.

Instruction: Malachi called the people to turn from their spiritual apathy and correct their wrong attitudes about worship by trusting God with genuine faith as their living Lord. This

included honoring the Lord's name with pure offerings, being faithful to covenants made with fellow believers, especially marriage covenants, and signifying their repentance with tithes.

Judgment: If the priests will not alter their behavior, the Lord will curse them, shame them, and remove them from service. Malachi also announces a coming day when the Lord of justice will come to purge and refine His people. At that time He will make evident the distinction between the obedient and the wicked and will judge the wicked.

Hope: Malachi also bases his instruction on (1) the Lord's demonstration of love for Israel (1:2), (2) their spiritual and covenant unity with God and with one another (2:10), and (3) that coming day when the Lord will also abundantly bless those who fear Him (3:1–6; 3:16–4:3).

Structure. Malachi's message is communicated in three interrelated movements or addresses. Each address contains five sections arranged in a mirror-like repetitive structure surrounding a central section (*a b c b a*). In the first two addresses, the focus is on the center section which contains the Lord's instruction (1:10; 2:15b–16). These addresses begin with positive motivation or hope (1:2–5; 2:10a) and end with negative motivation or judgment (2:1–9; 3:1–6). The second and fourth sections contain the indictment (1:6–9 and 1:11–14 in the first address; 2:10b–14 and 2:17 in the second). The climactic address begins and ends with a general call to repent (3:7–10a; 4:4–6). The indictment is in the center (3:13–15). The second section furnishes positive motivation or hope (3:10b–12), and the fourth section combines positive and negative motivation (3:16–4:3).

- I. Honor Yahweh (1:2–2:9)
- II. Faithfulness (2:10–3:6)
- III. Return and Remember (3:7–4:6)

THE LORD'S LOVE (1:1–5)

Despite their responsibility under the covenant of Levi (see 2:4, 8) to be the Lord's messengers of Torah (2:7), the postexilic priests were dishonoring the Lord, particularly in their careless attitude toward the offerings. They are exhorted to stop the empty worship and to begin honoring the Lord with pure offerings and faithful service. To encourage them the Lord declares His love for them (and for all Israel) in 1:2–5. To challenge them, He threatens them with humiliation and removal from His service (2:1–9).

Judah's disputing God's love shows that they had allowed their difficulties to steal their sense of God's loving presence. Such an impoverishment resulted in the moral decay denounced in the second address and the spiritual indifference criticized in the third. Following Judah's impertinent question, the Lord asserts that His love for Judah had been abundantly demonstrated in recent history (vv. 3–5). The Lord's love for Israel consists in His having chosen them out of all the nations for an intimate relationship with Himself and His faithfulness to them in that relationship. They should grasp God's love by simply comparing their blessings to Edom's punishments.

UNWORTHY WORSHIP (1:6–14)

The situation in the first address is that the priests were failing to honor or fear the Lord. The temple altar is compared to a dinner table which the Lord hosted. This table represented hospitality and relationship. One's attitude toward that table revealed one's attitude toward the

Lord. Judah's bringing blemished animals to the altar showed how little they valued their relationship with the Lord.

The Lord desired fear and honor manifested in proper sacrifices from pure hearts. But He preferred no ritual to the empty ritual Judah was orchestrating (v. 10; see Isa. 1:10–17; Amos 5:21–23). “Worship” that does not arise from wholehearted devotion to the Lord is sin (Prov. 15:8; Isa. 1:13; Amos 4:4; see Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6). The Lord is not dependent upon human offerings or service. They are means of testifying to His greatness and exalting His name. Worship also benefits the worshipers, serving to nourish their relationship with God individually and to encourage one another in the faith. But religious activity performed without genuine love and gratitude to God is not only useless but repulsive to Him because it slanders His character.

The point of 1:11–14 is that although a time is coming when even Gentiles all over the world will fear the Lord, God's own chosen people of Judah, His kingdom of priests who were supposed to mediate His grace to the nations, were profaning Him. Although God's purpose to make himself known and worshiped among the nations would not be thwarted, He would do it more in spite of Israel than by means of them (see Ezek. 36:20–36; 39:7; Rom. 3:1–8; 11:11–12). Still, the Messiah will be an Israelite (Rom. 9:5).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Mal 1)). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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