MALACHI

*My messenger will clear the way for me*

TIME PERIOD

4th century BC

KEY VERSE

*"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap."*

3:1-2

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**CONTENTS**

[INTRODUCTION 2](#_Toc136258568)

[MALACHI = “MY MESSENGER/“MY ANGEL” 2](#_Toc136258569)

[DATING 3](#_Toc136258570)

[SETTING: DISAPPOINTMENT 3](#_Toc136258571)

[STRUCTURE 3](#_Toc136258572)

[1. “I LOVE YOU!” (1:2-5) 4](#_Toc136258573)

[2. CONTEMPT & TIRING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (1:6—2:9) 5](#_Toc136258574)

[3. DOUBLE ADULTERY (2:10-16) 6](#_Toc136258575)

[4. DISBELIEF IN GOD'S JUSTICE AND WILL (2:17–3:5) 6](#_Toc136258576)

[5. TITHE AND CURSE (3:6-12) 7](#_Toc136258577)

[6. SELFISH MOTIVES IN FAITH (3:13—4:3) 8](#_Toc136258578)

[SUMMARY (4:4-6) 9](#_Toc136258579)

# INTRODUCTION

The name Malachi means "my messenger", and either the prophet's name is used in a pun in 3:1 (*"I send my messenger... "*), or this verse may be the origin of the name of the book. Malachi appears last in the Old Testament, and it is also common to place it in the 4th century BC as the temple is in use, *"governor"* is mentioned (1:8), and corrupt priests and intermarriage fit with the period under Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus, Malachi is one of the last books to be written in the OT, perhaps the very last.

The book is structured as a dialogue between the people and God. God says something, the people answer, and God explains. Sections 3:1-5 and 4:1-6 are a little different, and this is where we also get the clearest indications of Jesus. The messenger who was to prepare the way for God (3:1) was John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus (Mark 1:2). *"Elijah",* who was to come before the day of the Lord (4:5), was also John (Matthew 11:14).

So, it's fitting that OT ends like this. After "the 400 silent years" that follow when the OT ends, all the gospels open with John the Baptist, beginning to prepare the people for Jesus.

## MALACHI = “MY MESSENGER/“MY ANGEL”

**Interpretation 1: Malachi is not a name**

* Not found elsewhere in the Bible and contemporary sources, and does not resemble other Hebrew names.
* A strange name to give a child if it is not a short form of Malakija or something similar.
* LXX: “ *his messenger* ”. (Indicating that the Hebrew text is the original.)
* The Targum (Aramaic translation/interpretation of the OT) added a footnote that it was Ezra.
* Some church fathers and Jewish sources have also interpreted it literally as an angel.

**Interpretation 2: Malachi is the prophet's name**

* All the other books of the prophets have the name of the prophet in the title.
* Several of the ancient translations interpret it as a name (Peshitta, Theodotion, Symmachus, and Vulgate).
* "*The Lord*" in 1:1 is 3rd person. Should have read "*his messenger*" (as in the LXX) if Malachi is not a name.
* Pun on the name in 3:1 — Malachi's ministry points to the Lord's messenger.

## DATING

Edom is crushed (1:4) (→ after 553 BC)

The temple has been rebuilt (after 516 BC)

Nehemiah's time (445-433 BC)

* Problems with intermarriage (2:10-12) and tithing (3:6-12) fit with Neh 13:10-13, 23-27
* Perhaps at the same time as Nehemiah, Jeremiah (and perhaps Zephaniah) contributed to Josiah's reforms.
* Less likely after Nehemiah since the people promise to avoid intermarriage and to pay the tithe (Neh 10:30-39) (→ before 433 BC)

Safe bet: Sometime in the 4th century. Likely: Either 445-433 BC or approx. 400, when the problems possibly returned in the next generation.

## SETTING: DISAPPOINTMENT

* The temple was smaller and disappointing, even though Haggai and Zechariah had promised great things. Nor had the glory of God taken up residence in it as before. They were few and faced opposition from the surrounding peoples. They had not yet received the king that was promised. Neither Ezra, Nehemiah, nor Esther tell of great miracles from God or clear speech and leadership after the exile. Instead, life is completely normal and back to the way it was before, with no fulfillment of these promises in sight. Things had not turned out quite as foreshadowed after the return.

## STRUCTURE

**6 discussions**

* God's claim.
* The people's answer.
* God's explanation.

1st discussion (1:2-5): Edom's downfall is a sign that God loves Israel.

2nd discussion (1:6-2:9): The priests show contempt for God by sacrificing bad animals.

3rd discussion (2:10-16): Spiritual and marital adultery desecrates the covenant.

4th discussion (2:17-3:5): Apathetic to justice since God does not judge.

5th discussion (3:6-12): Call to repentance by resuming the tithe.

6th discussion (3:13-4:3): Selfish motives have led to envy.

Summary (4:4-6): Remember the law - until the day of the Lord comes.

# 1. “I LOVE YOU!” (1:2-5)

God: *"I have loved you"*

Israel: *"How have you loved us?"*

God: Look at Edom

* God has shown them his love by choosing their ancestor Jacob and not Edom's ancestor Esau.
* Edom will never be a threat again. An eternal reminder that Israel is chosen and loved.
* Reflection will show that God loves them.
* Do they doubt because life is difficult? (Neh 1:3) Are they wicked? (2:17, 3:14-15)

*"You have wearied the Lord with your words. “How have we wearied him?” you ask.*

*By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”"* 2:17

*"You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.’"* 3:14-15

* Is there anything that can make you doubt that God loves you?
* God's love for us is shown most of all on the cross (1 John 4:7-10)

# 2. CONTEMPT & TIRING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (1:6—2:9)

God: You priests show contempt for my name (verse 6).

The priests: How have we shown contempt for your name?

God: By offering defiled food on my altar.

The priests: How have we defiled you?

God: By saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible.

They think that a bad sacrifice is better than no sacrifice. God says it would have been better if someone had closed the temple so the altar would not be defiled.

v. 11 Likely future (ESV): Contrast between Israel's half-hearted sacrifices and the nations' future pure sacrifices in spirit and truth (John 4:24) through Jesus.

They find the whole scheme tiring (1:13) and do not understand the value of having this relationship with God (2:5).

The priests show the opposite of reverence: contempt for God's name.

The Law of Moses said they should give God the best, but they sacrifice blind, lame and sick animals.

To act in an unworthy manner = to defile

They give God less glory than their earthly masters.

Are we giving God the glory He deserves?

When can we catch ourselves thinking "what a struggle it is to be a Christian"?

So what could be the underlying problem? That we have not understood grace? That we don't believe that he wants the best for us? That we don't trust him to be in control?

# 3. DOUBLE ADULTERY (2:10-16)

God: I will not accept your sacrifices.

Israel: Why?

God: Because you are unfaithful.

They have married idolaters (like Solomon and Ahab), who have no intention of becoming a part of God's people. This desecrates God's sanctuary (2:11) and makes the people unclean.

Idolatry had led to the exile.

v. 14: The Lord is a witness (as a best man in a wedding?)

v. 15 → Genesis 2:24? (ESV)

v. 16: Some English translations have "[*I hate divorce*](https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Malachi%202:16)"

Keyword: Faithless (5x)

2 things: Spiritual adultery against God (vv. 11-12) and adultery in marriage (vv. 13-16).

Perhaps they had divorced their Israelite wives and married foreigners (→ Ezra and Nehemiah?).

Same principle in 1 Pet 3:7: *"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."*

Marriage is not a contract but a covenant. And not between two, but between three. The marriage covenant must be kept before God.

# 4. DISBELIEF IN GOD'S JUSTICE AND WILL (2:17–3:5)

God: You have wearied the Lord with your words.

Israel: How have we wearied him?

God: By saying that all who do evil are good in the Lord's eyes, or that God does not judge.

The characters mentioned in Malachi 3:1 are *"my messenger"* (Greek: Malachi), *"the LORD"* (Greek: Yahweh, Hebrew: ha-Adon) and *"the messenger of the covenant"* (Greek: Malach Haberit). Matt 11:7-10, Mark 1:2 and Luke 1:76 help us identify these as God (Yahweh), John the Baptist (Malachi) and Jesus (ha-Adon/Malach Haberit).

God himself came in Jesus but sent John the Baptist to prepare.

They were tempted to skip living according to God's will because it is a challenge, and they felt that God never judges. However, God himself will suddenly come to judge, for instance, adulterers and those who do not fear him — who can endure it? (3:2)

Why doesn't God intervene? Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? (2 Peter 3:1-4)

Is there any point in sticking to God's will when others seem to have a better life than me?

When is it tempting to put aside Christian ethics and rather live in a worldly way?

# 5. TITHE AND CURSE (3:6-12)

God: Return to me

Israel: How shall we return?

God: You rob me.

Israel: How are we robbing you?

God: In tithes and offerings.

vv. 10-11 → Deuteronomy 28:23-24, 38-40, 42

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty." vv. 10-11

*"The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed."* Deuteronomy 28:23-24

*"You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off."* Deuteronomy 28:38-40

*"Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land."* Deuteronomy 28:38-40

Can't be taken out of context! In the new covenant, we are not under the law, and we do not come under any curse. Jesus has bought us free from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13).

*"‘A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it. Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the Lord."* Leviticus 27:30-32

*"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting."* Numbers 18:21

*"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year."* Deuteronomy 14:22

The tithe went to the temple, the priests, the temple service and the poor.

The tithe was part of the law, and breaking the law led to covenant curses.

Who owns what you have? Is it yours, or are you managing what God has given you?

2 Corinthians 9:6-14 — A higher standard, but freedom. Not tithing and coercion, but happy giving. God provides and blesses. This leads to thanksgiving to God and a better community.

# 6. SELFISH MOTIVES IN FAITH (3:13—4:3)

God: You have spoken arrogantly against me.

Israel: What have we said against you?

God: You say, "It is futile to serve God."

Some took Malachi's message to heart and encouraged each other to fear God instead of giving in to envy and doing injustice for their own gain.

God notices those who fear him, and he remembers them. They shall be his when the judgement comes. Then no one will regret that they clung to God or say that it was useless. At that time, they will rejoice.

Some have selfish motives to serve God. They think that if they get nothing in return for it, they might as well live in injustice.

They do not complain *to* God but *about* God.

What do I gain by following God? Am I self-centered or God-centered?

*"Comparing yourself to others makes you either dissatisfied or arrogant."* Peter Adams (The quote has been translated.)

God does not forget those who cling to Him. He does not forget your faithfulness to Him, even if the tide goes in the opposite direction.

# SUMMARY (4:4-6)

1. Remember the Law of Moses

2. Elijah, God's messenger, comes before the day of the Lord.

* John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14, 17:11-13)
* v. 5-6: *"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."* Is this about uniting families? Luke 1:16-17 indicates that it is about turning to God: *"He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* Luke 1:16-17

Moses and Elijah:

*"Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."* Matt 17:3

"*And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.*" Rev 11:3

* Moses was the first prophet mentioned, and Elijah was the last.

Why *"herem"* (ban) and not covenant curse?

* Judgment by destruction.
* God's last word is never judgment. There must be something more.

Remember the law — until the day of the Lord comes.

1-2 Thessalonians: Live holy lives — until Jesus returns.