

# Malachi and the Middle

A study of the final book of the Old Testament and brief overview of the Intertestamental Period

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## Introduction

### Author, Approximate Date, and Occasion for Writing:

- Malachi means “My Messenger.” Given the use of “my messenger” in **Malachi 3:1** as a title and the translation in the LXX of “through Malachi” in **Malachi 1:1** as “my messenger,” some scholars think this book is written more anonymously by an unnamed prophet (messenger of God). Likely, it’s the personal name of Malachi the prophet.
- Malachi’s rebukes and admonitions concern the same deplorable conditions wherein the leaders of the people during the post-exilic period found it necessary to correct with strong emphasis: sacrifices or poor quality, neglect in paying tithes, putting themselves on dangerous spiritual ground through marriages to non-Israelites.
- Malachi is preceded as prophet by Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied during governorship of Zerubbabel (516 B.C.). Ezra the priest arrived with thousands of more Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (458 B.C.) 13 years later, Nehemiah arrives in 445 B.C. and began reforms to the poor and honoring the Sabbath. Nehemiah returned to Persia for a time and things in Jerusalem returned to the previous state. Many of these same issues are addressed by Malachi who speaks to the people with the same urgency as the prophets before the scattering of Samaria and exile of Judah. Indirectly, Malachi refers to himself in **Malachi 4:4-6** as the last prophet by reminding the people to remember the law of Moses and to look ahead to the coming Elijah before the LORD’s arrival. This is referred to as “the sealing of the prophets.”
- Malachi’s style is animated, highly structured, and contains many exchanges between God and his people through a “past, present, future” series of conversations. 47 of the 55 verses of this book include the LORD speaking to his people in first-person address.

### New Testament Usage of Malachi

- Malachi is cited or paraphrased 12 times in the New Testament:

Malachi 1:2b-3	Romans 9:13
Malachi 1:7, 12	I Corinthians 10:21
Malachi 2:10	I Corinthians 8:6
Malachi 3:1	Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2-3; Lk 7:27
Malachi 3:2	Revelation 6:7
Malachi 4:2	Luke 1:78
Malachi 4:5	Mt 11:14; 17:10-12; Mk 9:11-13
Malachi 4:6	Luke 1:16-17

## Structure

- Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the love of God to the children of Israel and reproof of the sins of the priests and people
- Chapters 3 and 4 detail judgement from God because of lack of faithfulness to God and a promise of joy in the days of the coming Messiah

## Thematic Question:

- Why is this the final word of the Old Testament? Let that big question guide your study of this book. Why did God choose to say these things to his people before ~400 years of radio silence?

## Chapter 1

A prophecy: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. <sup>2</sup> “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob, <sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.” <sup>4</sup> Edom 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. <sup>5</sup> You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’ <sup>6</sup> “A son honors his father, and a slave 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 priests who show contempt for my name. “But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’ <sup>7</sup> “By offering defiled food on my altar. “But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ “By saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible. <sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame 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. <sup>9</sup> “Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?”— says the Lord Almighty. <sup>10</sup> “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. <sup>11</sup> My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord Almighty. <sup>12</sup> “But you profane it by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled,’ and, ‘Its food is contemptible.’ <sup>13</sup> And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” says the Lord Almighty. “When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” says the Lord. <sup>14</sup> “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.

1. The first word of the book is “prophecy/oracle” but it also has the idea of being a load, a burden to carry, a weighty thing. What is the burden of the LORD a prophet like Malachi was to carry?
  - How can Israel be the recipient when the Northern Kingdom had been scattered throughout Assyria many years before?

2. What is the first weighty word God says to his people through Malachi in **1:2**? Why is it so important to start a book of prophecy with this truth?
  - Even though this is true, complete with many pronouncements from God to substantiate it, what's the all too common human response?
  - Have you said a similar thing or felt a similar way? What was going on which led you to say this to God?
  
3. What's with the "Esau I have hated" bit? Is God flippant with his grace and love? What's the history here? See **Genesis 25:23** and **Exodus 33:19**.
  - Look at the writing craft of **v. 4**: Edom says, "We're crushed, but we'll rebuild!" God says, "They may build, but I will demolish." Considering **Psalm 2:1-2, 10-11**, what's the ideal result of this type of exchange between God and any nation?
  
4. "Where is the honor due me?" God asks in **v. 6**. Even though not directly addressed to us, what about this question should make us all feel like we're under the spotlight of God's justice?
  
5. What were the people, led by the priests, doing which brought stern rebuke from the Lord? What rhetorical scenario of God use in **v. 8** to bring this into sharp focus?
  - Do we do the same things? If so, what's it look like?
  
6. What strong things does God say to his people in **v. 10**? What's the impact on God's people of hearing that?
  
7. Why does God desire the greatness he speaks of in **v. 11**? How will sacrifices be pure when they were so defiled by God's own people at the time of writing? Consider **Colossians 3:17** and **Romans 12:1-2**.
  
8. "Will he accept your offering?" **v. 13** asks. Nothing is required of us to be right with God. Truth. Where, then, does repentance fit into this discussion?
  - When does worship of God feel like a burden?
  - On what very strong note does this chapter end? What does it mean to be cursed by God?