

# MALACHI

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# INTRODUCTION

## AUTHOR

The author of this book is introduced by name in the opening verse of this book (1:1). Malachi is a Hebrew name that means “My Messenger” or “The Messenger of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

## DATE

Malachi prophesied after the return of God’s people from exile to Judah and Jerusalem during the rule of the Persians. We do not know an exact date, but it was likely between 460 and 400 BC.<sup>2</sup> Malachi was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. Internal evidence implies the existence of a temple (Mal. 1:10, 3:1, 8), which would require a date after the temple was reconstructed through the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. In addition, the reference to “governor” (1:8) is often used in reference to regional officials during Persian control.<sup>3</sup>

## AUDIENCE<sup>4</sup>

Malachi’s audience is “Israel” (v.1). The people of God, Israel, originally existed as one people separated into twelve tribes. They then split into two kingdoms during the time of Jeroboam and Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). The northern kingdom, which consisted of the ten tribes based in Samaria, became known as Israel, and the southern kingdom, which consisted of the two tribes in Jerusalem, became known as Judah. Both kingdoms went into exile: Israel (the northern kingdom) by the hands of the Assyrians and Judah (the southern kingdom) by the hands of the Babylonians. Even though Malachi addresses “Israel,” internal evidence within the book concludes that Malachi is actually prophesying to Judah (i.e., reference to the temple in 1:10 and Jerusalem and Judah in 3:4). This begs the question: Why is Judah addressed as Israel?

Malachi refers to the early history of God’s people, specifically to Isaac and his two sons Esau and Jacob. In so doing, he refers to the Lord’s love for Jacob, who was later renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28).

Judah represents God’s people and inherits all the promises made to all the people of God. It also points to God’s fulfillment of his promises to gather his people again into the land and to the city of Jerusalem.

Therefore, the people of God are addressed by the name Israel, which speaks of God’s choice of his people, of his judgment on his people when they turn from him, and of his effective grace in achieving his long-term saving purpose.

# INTRODUCTION *(continued)*

## GENRE

The content of Malachi places it within the category of prophetic literature, but the form that this prophetic literature takes is different from other prophetic works in Scripture.<sup>5</sup> It is written entirely in prose. The book of Malachi is part of the “Minor Prophets” or “The Twelve,” which is the name given to the last twelve books of the English Old Testament. The prophets use a wide range of literary devices such as poetic imagery, wordplay, irony and allusions to maximize the vividness and power of their message.<sup>6</sup>

## LITERARY STRUCTURE

The book of Malachi is structured around six different disputes that the people have with God. One of the most striking features of Malachi is the way in which every word of God is contradicted or questioned by God’s people.<sup>7</sup> The six disputations are:


- First Dispute: Malachi 1:2-5
- Second Dispute: Malachi 1:6-2:9
- Third Dispute: Malachi 2:10-16
- Fourth Dispute: Malachi 2:17-3:5
- Fifth Dispute: Malachi 3:6-12
- Sixth Dispute: Malachi 3:13-4:3

These disputes are also structured as a chiasm, which is a literary device in which the sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. For instance, the third and fourth disputes are about how the people of God were treating each other. The second and fifth disputes are about how the people of Israel were dealing with their own lives. The first and sixth disputes are about how they regarded God.

The book of Malachi also represents the last prophetic word in the Old Testament. After his prophecy, God’s people experience 400 years of silence.

## PURPOSE

God speaks to his people through his prophet Malachi in order to affirm his unwavering love for them despite their lack of love and devotion to him.<sup>8</sup> Over time God’s people have disregarded God’s law and proper devotion to him. Their worship and devotion to God at this time could be characterized as half-hearted. While they are not actually running away from God or worshiping idols as they had in the past, they seem to lack energy to serve God wholeheartedly. All of the external structures of worship have been restored post exile, but the hearts of God’s people have not. They attempt to live in neutral territory in regards to their relationship with God.



As a result, God sends Malachi to his people to confront their half-hearted worship. Through their interactions we see a stark contrast between what God thinks and what his people think. God's people have stopped listening and obeying God's word.

The book of Malachi ends the Old Testament perfectly. The selfishness that began and took root in the garden is still reigning today. External circumstances could not change the hearts of mankind. God's people are still enslaved to sin and await a Savior that has the ability to transform them internally as a people. Malachi ends with God promising to send a messenger that will prepare the way for the Lord. This messenger will help turn the hearts of many back to God before the Lord returns (Malachi 3:1-4; 4:5-6).

# MALACHI 1:1-5

## PASSAGE

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

2 “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob 3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” 4 If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the LORD of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.’” 5 Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!”

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Election: Sovereign Love*

Election is God’s eternal choice of some persons to receive eternal life, not because of foreseen merit in them, but because of His mere mercy in Christ (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:3-6; Acts 13:48). It should leave us humble because we did not earn it and confident because we can never lose it. It is a source of inexpressible comfort to the believer and the unbeliever, for if salvation were based on who could meet the right conditions, then no one would be saved.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How should God’s people receive the oracles of His Word? (*See 1 Peter 4:11*)
2. Do you ever doubt God’s love? For what reasons are you tempted to do so?
3. Is there a part of God’s sovereign election that doesn’t sit right with you? Why do you think this is?
4. What should the reality of God’s sovereign love produce in us? How is God glorified through his election of his people?

## NOTES

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# MALACHI 1:6-14

## PASSAGE

6 “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?” says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ 7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised. 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. 9 And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. 10 Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. 11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. 12 But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. 13 But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. 14 Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *True Worship vs. False Worship*

We were all created to worship God alone, but because of sin, our worship is often misplaced and misdirected. This is false worship because the object of our worship is not the Triune God of the universe. Apathetic or half-hearted worship is not true worship because it reveals that the object of our worship is not the Triune God in his glory. True worship involves living our entire lives as a sacrifice to the God who graciously sacrificed himself for us. The God of all creation deserves nothing less than our whole lives laid out before him in worship.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that you have found helpful in preparing your heart and mind for Sunday morning worship?
2. How would you determine the difference between pure worship and defiled worship?
3. Why does God care about how he is worshiped?
4. In the day-to-day Christian life, what does it look like to offer our lives as a sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God? (*See Romans 12:1-2*)

## NOTES

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# MALACHI 2:1-9

## PASSAGE

1 “And now, O priests, this command is for you. 2 If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. 3 Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. 4 So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. 6 True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. 7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, 9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Corrupted Leaders vs. Qualified Leaders*

God gives qualified men to the church to lead as a gift in order to equip and care for her (Eph. 4:11-12). A good and qualified leader brings great blessing while a bad and corrupted leader brings chaos and deep hurt. How are we to know if a leader is qualified or corrupt? God provides the church with his qualifications for leaders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Appointing leaders who do not fit these qualifications results in chaos, not blessing. However, our hope should never be placed in a human leader but in Jesus Christ who serves as our holy, innocent, and exalted high priest (Heb. 7:26).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has your experience with spiritual leaders been generally positive or negative? What was the result of their leadership in your life?
2. What expectations should we have for our spiritual leaders? What expectations does God have for them?
3. How do you respond to correction and rebuke in your life?
4. How does fearing the Lord rightly affect the way we lead ourselves and others?

## NOTES

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# MALACHI 2:10-16

## PASSAGE

10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

13 And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *God's Covenant Faithfulness*

God is faithful, which means that he is unchanging in nature and that he is true to his word and his promises. Marriage, the union between one man and one woman, is designed to reflect God's faithfulness to his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33). At the heart of marriage is a faithful love that endures and keeps its promises throughout the hardships of life and through the volatile nature of our feelings. Similarly, God continues to extend his faithful love to sinners and keeps his promises despite our unfaithfulness, broken promises, and fleeting feelings (2 Tim. 2:13).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what areas do we tend to be faithless? How might this affect the larger church community?
2. How do problems in our horizontal relationships with others reveal problems in our vertical relationship with God?
3. How does marriage reflect God's covenant faithfulness to his people? How is this different from how our larger culture views marriage?
4. How can we care for those who have become vulnerable to the financial, social, and emotional damage of divorce?

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# MALACHI 2:17-3:6

## PASSAGE

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

3:1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

5 “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

6 “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Justice*

God is just, which means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right. This truth brings great comfort to those who have been treated poorly or unjustly. God will not overlook injustice. God in his own timing will right all wrongs and punish all acts of wickedness. As his people we can therefore repeat with confidence, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share about a time in your life when you were asking, “Where is the God of justice?”
2. Where might your evaluations of what is just and unjust misalign with what God says is just and unjust?
3. How does Jesus bring peace into situations we deem unjust? How can we remember these truths in the emotions of injustice?
4. If your worship were to be defined by how you treat your neighbor, would your worship be acceptable?



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# MALACHI 3:7-12

## PASSAGE

7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' 8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. 12 Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Old Testament Tithing vs. New Testament Generosity*

While tithing, giving a tenth of one's wages to the Lord, was commended and commanded in the Old Testament under the Mosaic Covenant (Gen. 28:22; Lev. 27:30-32; Num. 18:21-28), it no longer applies to Christians today because we are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:5-6). Instead, as recipients of extravagant grace, we should respond with extravagant generosity and cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7-9).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel far from the Lord right now?
2. How would you define true repentance? What does it look like? How do you know that you have truly repented?
3. What are common barriers that we all face in being generous with what God has given us? How can we help each other overcome these?
4. Do you tend to assume God's mercy or his wrath? What is a balanced biblical approach to this?

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# MALACHI 3:13-18

## PASSAGE

13 “Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ 14 You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? 15 And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’”

16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. 17 “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. 18 Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Fear of the Lord*

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). It is meant to be a continual, humble submission to God that leads one to hate evil and turn away from it (Prov. 23:17; 8:3; 16:6). It comes with rewards that are far better than any earthly treasure (Prov. 15:16). In short, to fear the Lord is to recognize God for all that He is — holy, merciful, just, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love — and to respond to who he is appropriately with humble submission and awe.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When are you most tempted to believe that serving God is vain?
2. How can serving God turn into serving self?
3. Is God’s justice something that you find hard to believe? What gives you confidence that God is just?
4. What does it look like to practically fear the Lord? How can we grow in our fear of the Lord?

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# MALACHI 4:1-6

## PASSAGE

1“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

4 “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

## THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT

### *Day of the Lord*

The “Day of the Lord” refers to the time when God will punish and restore the whole world through the first and second comings of Christ. The New Testament points to Jesus Christ as the one who fulfills the “Day of the Lord.” He inaugurated it with his death and resurrection and will consummate it with his second coming. Unrepentant sinners should fear this day, but those who have been forgiven and redeemed should await this day with hopeful anticipation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you struggle with the idea of a day of judgment? Why or why not?
2. What does remembering the Day of the Lord do to your faith?
3. What does it look like to practically live in anticipation for the Day of the Lord? What should we be doing and not doing? What should we give our attention to?
4. What future promises do you most long to see fulfilled?

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# REFERENCES

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>ESV Study Bible, pg. 1771

<sup>2</sup>Peter Adam, The Message of Malachi, pg. 30

<sup>3</sup>ESV Study Bible, pg. 1771

<sup>4</sup>Peter Adam, The Message of Malachi, pg. 28-29

<sup>5</sup>ESV Study Bible, pg. 1772

<sup>6</sup>Robert Chisholm, Interpreting the Minor Prophets, pg.15

<sup>7</sup>Peter Adam, The Message of Malachi, pg. 13

<sup>8</sup>Bill Arnold and Bryan Beyer, Encountering the Old Testament, pg. 463

<sup>9</sup>Peter Adam, The Message of Malachi, pg.13-14





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