

Malachi — The Prophet Who Called Israel to Remember the Covenant

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

I. Identity of Malachi

Name and Known Facts

- “Malachi” means “my messenger” or “my angel.” Scripture gives no father, tribe, hometown, or personal biography.
- The book opens as “the burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (Mal. 1:1). Though the name may sound like a title, the book presents him as the prophet through whom the Lord speaks.

Prophetic Role

- Malachi speaks after the return from Babylon, when the temple stands but covenant faithfulness is weak.
- He addresses priests, people, husbands, worshipers, and the nation, exposing polluted worship, broken faithfulness, and wrong thinking about the Lord’s justice.
- He also looks ahead to the Lord’s messenger, the Lord’s coming to His temple, and the great day of the Lord.

II. Historical Setting

Returned Judah After the Temple Was Rebuilt

- Malachi likely ministers after Haggai and Zechariah, in the Persian period after the second temple is standing.
- The people are back in the land, still under Gentile rule, and the promised restoration has not yet arrived in fullness.
- Temple service continues, but priests and people have grown careless and cynical.

The Problem

- Israel questions the Lord’s love: “Wherein hast thou loved us?” (1:2).
- The priests despise His name by offering polluted sacrifices (1:6–8).
- The people deal treacherously in marriage and covenant relationships (2:10–16).
- They question divine justice, rob God in tithes and offerings, and speak hard words against Him (2:17; 3:8, 13).

III. Nature of Malachi’s Ministry

A Prophet of Covenant Disputation

- Malachi often records the Lord’s charge, Israel’s objection, and the Lord’s answer.
- This question-and-answer form exposes spiritual dullness; Israel does not see its own sin clearly.
- The book is a covenant lawsuit against Israel in her land with her temple and priesthood, not a general moral essay.

A Call to Priests and People

- The priests are charged first because they should guard knowledge and teach the law (2:7), yet they have corrupted the covenant of Levi (2:8).
- The people are also accountable for polluted worship, marital treachery, and refusing the Lord what He required.

A Closing Prophetic Voice

- Malachi stands at the end of the Old Testament prophetic record.
- He closes by pointing Israel back to Moses and forward to Elijah before the day of the Lord (4:4–6).

IV. Major Themes

The LORD’s Covenant Love for Israel

- The book begins with the Lord’s declaration: “I have loved you” (1:2).
- Israel’s doubt is answered by the Lord’s electing purpose regarding Jacob and Esau (1:2–5); His covenant purpose still stands.

Polluted Worship and Priestly Failure

- The priests offer blind, lame, and sick animals while acting as though the Lord should accept them (1:7–8).
- The Lord says His name will be great among the nations, even while Israel treats His table lightly (1:11–12).
- Formal worship becomes offensive when it is careless, corrupt, and contrary to the Lord’s requirement.

Treachery in the Covenant Community

- Judah has profaned the holiness of the Lord by covenant unfaithfulness (2:10–12).
- Malachi rebukes men who deal treacherously with the wife of their youth (2:14–16).
- Worship, family faithfulness, and covenant integrity cannot be separated.

The Messenger and the Coming Lord

- The Lord promises, “I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (3:1).
- The Lord will come suddenly to His temple as refiner, purifier, and judge (3:1–5).
- The New Testament identifies John the Baptist with the messenger who prepares the way (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27).

Remembrance and the Day of the LORD

- Those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another, and a book of remembrance was written before Him (3:16).
- The Lord distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked, even when present circumstances seem confusing (3:17–18).
- The coming day burns against the proud and wicked, but for those who fear His name the “Sun of righteousness” will arise with healing (4:1–2).

V. Structure of the Book

Book Flow

- 1:1–5 — The Lord declares His love; Israel questions it; He answers by pointing to Jacob, Esau, and Edom.
- 1:6–2:9 — The priests despise His name, offer polluted sacrifices, and violate the covenant of Levi.
- 2:10–16 — Judah is charged with covenant treachery, especially in marriage, while still coming to the altar.
- 2:17–3:6 — Israel questions divine justice; the Lord promises His messenger and His own coming in judgment and refining.
- 3:7–18 — The Lord calls Israel to return, charges the nation with robbery, and distinguishes those who fear Him.
- 4:1–6 — The day of the Lord burns against the wicked and brings healing for those who fear Him; Israel must remember Moses and expect Elijah.

VI. Why Malachi Matters

- Malachi confronts a people who still have temple, sacrifices, priests, and Scripture, yet have grown weary of the Lord.
- He shows that religious form without covenant faithfulness is not acceptable worship.
- He closes the Old Testament by sending Israel backward to Moses and forward to Elijah, John the Baptist, Messiah, and the coming kingdom.