

## Introduction

### Background

**Name & Author:** Malachi. The name Malachi means “my messenger,” leading some to believe that it was not written by someone with the name Malachi, but is actually authored anonymously.

**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, approximately 100 years after the return of the exiles from Babylon.

**Audience:** The Jews in Palestine who have returned from exile. The people were no longer involved in idolatry. However, having suffered from famine, the people began to doubt Yahweh’s love and justice.

### Structure

Introduction	The Lord rejects Israel's sacrifices						The Lord assures Israel of His justice						Conclusion						
	1 <sup>st</sup> dispute: Yahweh's love		2 <sup>nd</sup> dispute: Temple Worship			3 <sup>rd</sup> dispute: Marriage			4 <sup>th</sup> dispute: Israel doubts God's justice		5 <sup>th</sup> dispute: God asks Israel to test His justice			6 <sup>th</sup> dispute: Israel doubts the profit in serving God					
			Israel offers blemished animals	The corrupt priesthood	Israel marries foreigners	Israel divorces													
1:1	1:2	1:5	1:6	4	2:1	2:9	0	2:1	2	3	6	2:1	3:6	3:7	2	3	4:3	4:4	4:6

Malachi is structured around six disputes. Each dispute follows a consistent pattern:

- The issue is raised by Yahweh (e.g. “I have loved you,’ says the Lord.”)
- The people question Yahweh (e.g. But you say, “How have You loved us,”)
- Yahweh responds by showing examples.

These six disputes are divided into two primary sections. The first three deal with Israel’s second-rate sacrifices. The last three deal with Israel’s doubts about God’s justice.

### Purpose

The purpose of Malachi is to explain to Israel that the LORD was not accepting their offerings and to call them to return to the LORD. Malachi uses strong words to describe their offerings, calling them defiled (1:7), despised (1:12), profane (1:12, 2:11), an abomination (2:11), treacherous (2:11, 15-16), and robbery (3:8-9). Furthermore, because of their unacceptable offerings, Malachi states that God is displeased (1:10, 2:3, 2:9, 2:13, 3:9) and weary (2:17) of them.

The Israelites were aware that God had been withholding His favor from them. Not only were they not seeing God’s blessing (3:14), but also the wicked were prospering (3:15). The Israelites had

come to believe that God saw the evildoers as good and that He delighted in them (2:17). They were seeing the arrogant being blessed and the wicked escaping God's judgment (3:15). They had come to believe that there was no benefit to serving God (3:14). All this led them to doubt God's love (1:2) and doubt God's justice (2:17). Malachi uses this God's seeming injustice as proof that their sacrifices and offerings were unacceptable to God.

Israel appeared to be dumb-founded over why God would not be blessing them (1:7, 2:14, 3:8, 3:13). They were unable to see the connection between their behavior and God's displeasure with them (2:17). Malachi uses the Israelites' doubt and confusion to his advantage by structuring the book around a series of rhetorical arguments between Israel and God.

## Theme

Malachi called for Israel to return to the LORD (3:7). Specifically, he called on them to give the *whole* tithe to the LORD (3:10), and to remember the Law of Moses (4:4). If they tested God in the tithe, he promised to bring them such blessings from heaven that the nations would call them blessed (3:10-12). After returning to Him, they would see the God of justice they had been missing (2:17, 3:18).

## The LORD rejects Israel's sacrifices (1:6-2:16).

### First Dispute: Yahweh's Love

In the first dispute, Yahweh declares His love for His people. But the circumstances lead Israel to doubt the love of God. But God demonstrates his love by comparing how he treats them to their neighbor nation Edom, reminding them of his compassion on them while Edom sits in judgment by God.

### Second Dispute: Temple Worship

#### The Israelites are offering blemished animals (1:6-14).

In the second dispute, God tells Israel that they have despised Him. Israel asks, "how have we despised and defiled You? (1:6-7). God answers that He has been despised by their offerings of blemished animals (1:8a)

The Israelites were bringing blind, lame, sick and blemished animals to be sacrificed at the temple (1:8, 13, 14). God tells them that their governor would not accept these offerings (1:8), so they should be not surprised if He does not receive them kindly (1:9). Because their sacrifices are blemished, God states he will not accept their offerings (1:10) and will instead curse them (1:14).

The people thought they could appease God by bringing their leftovers to be sacrificed. But God is not satisfied with our leftovers. He demands our best.

In verse 8, God suggests "Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" God deserves no less than what we give our government or what we give our employers. In fact, God deserves more. He is our Lord. He is our King. He is, as it says in verse 6, our father. He deserves our honor. We can not expect him to bless us if we are cheating him out of our very best.

#### *Acceptance of the Gentiles' Offerings*

In a sub-theme of the book, God expresses His desire that His name would be praised and feared by all nations (1:5, 1: 11-14). In contrast to the unacceptable offerings of Israel, the Lord states that pure and acceptable sacrifices were going to be offered from "every place" so that God's name would be "great among the nations."

### **The priests are corrupt (2:1-9).**

The priests, because of their corrupt partiality (1:9) and poor instructions (1:8), were allowing these blemished sacrifices. The LORD states that the Levitical covenant, which governed the sacrifices, was intended to give life, peace and awe to the people (2:5). The priests' instructions were intended to bring about peace with God and return people from their iniquity (2:6). But their instructions were causing the people to stumble (2:8). As a result, they had corrupted the covenant (2:8) and were cursed by God (2:2-3).

### **Third Dispute: Marriage**

In the third dispute the form changes as Malachi speaks on behalf of God. Malachi declares that Israel is a family with God as the father and creator (2:10a). But Israel's corruption of marriage is treachery against this family and therefore abomination before God (2:10b-11).

### **The Israelites are marrying foreigners (2:10-12).**

The Israelites had been marrying foreign women (2:11). Malachi states this was a treachery to the nation (2:10) and an abomination to God (2:11). Through this intermarriage, the people had profaned the sanctuary (2:11) and rendered their offerings unacceptable to God (2:12). Therefore the God will cut off the offenders from the nation.

### **The Israelites are divorcing their wives (2:13-16).**

The Israelites were divorcing their wives, breaking the marriage covenant they had made before the LORD (2:14). This also was considered as treacherous (2:15,16), and rendered their offerings unacceptable to God (2:13). God states his hatred for divorce (2:16). While in other passages of scripture we find that there might be biblical reasons for divorce to be permitted, none of these cases violate this fundamental principle: God hates divorce. He hates it even when it can be justified. Divorce is never God's best for His people.

## **The LORD assures Israel of His justice (2:17-4:3).**

### **Fourth Dispute: Israel doubts God's justice (2:14-3:6)**

In the fourth dispute, Israel has wearied God by asking "where is the God of justice?" (2:17). God's response is that justice will come when the LORD's messenger comes (3:1a). The messenger will purify the priests & make the offerings acceptable (3:1b-4). Then the LORD will bring judgment and justice for His people (3:5-6).

### **Fifth Dispute: God asks Israel to test His justice (3:7-12)**

God accuses Israel of robbing Him. The people respond, "How do we rob you?" God explains they were not giving God the tithes and offerings due Him.

To encourage the people, God gives the people a challenge: if you don't rob me, if you give me the tithes and offerings that you are supposed to, I will bring you such an incredible return on your investment, that you aren't going to be able to store the return.

God is issuing a challenge. See if you can out give me. See if you can give more to me than I can give back to you. There is a little phrase, a little idiom that goes, "You can not out-give God." If I give to him, he will "open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it."

We need to discuss this blessing though, because I know there is a lot of confusion as to what God is promising here. There are a number of teachers today who will tell you that this "blessing" from God is a monetary blessing. But God is not obligated to give financial rewards for giving a tithe. To say that being blessed by God means being blessed with wealth goes against the rest of

scripture, takes this verse out of context and only merely serves to justify our own selfish materialism.

If the floodgates of heaven, if the blessings of God are material, God has nothing to offer me more than what a good mutual fund. If the floodgates of heaven are holding dollar bills, what a sad empty place heaven must be. God's blessings are hope, peace, well being, and an abundant life.

That is not to say that the blessing of God does not include money. I have heard testimony after testimony of people even in this church who have decided to give money sacrificially. And when it came time to pay the bills, God had provided miraculously for there to be enough money. But those blessings were not monetary blessings. First, usually when God has miraculously given, it has been to meet needs, not to provide for a new BMW. Secondly, the blessing wasn't the actual material item, but the blessing was the sense of security, the sense of hope knowing that God cares and meets our needs.

### **Sixth Dispute: Israel doubts the profit in serving God (3:13-4:3)**

Having learned these principles, the people still weren't seeing how this worked. They didn't see how serving God, living according to his principles would bring a blessing. They doubted that they would ever see God's blessing. This leads to the sixth dispute.

Israel states it is vain to serve God (3:13-15). But the Lord will remember, spare, and bless those who fear Him (3:16-17). He will destroy the wicked (3:18-4:1), and those who fear the Lord will rise, skip, and tread on the wicked (4:2-3).

Cheating can be pragmatic. The wicked do have more fun. There is short-term pleasure in disobedience to God. And, admittedly, sometimes that the short term does seem very short.

But Malachi says, "look past the short term. Look to the Day of the Lord." The Day of the Lord is the euphemism used by the prophets to mean the end of the world, the final judgment of God. Malachi says, look forward to the Day of the Lord, and you will see that ignoring the principles of God may provide short term pleasure, but in the end it does not pay.

## **Conclusion (4:4-6)**

Malachi concludes the book with a short appendix calling upon the people to remember two of God's greatest servants in the history of Israel: Moses and Elijah.

Israel is first to remember the Law given by God to Moses (4:4). Then they are to remember Elijah. For Elijah will come before the Day of the LORD (4:5) and restore harmony in the family (4:6). When that takes place, the famine and suffering the people are facing will finally be taken away.

## **Bibliography**

Laney, J. Carl and Robert B. Hughes. "Malachi." *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2002.