

Malachi's Prophecy to the Remnant (c. 432/431 BC)

Malachi 1–4

Title

1:1 An oracle. The word of Yahweh to Israel through Malachi.

Israel Questions God's Claim of Love

2 "I have loved you," says Yahweh, but you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is Esau not Jacob's brother?" declares Yahweh. "I have loved Jacob,

3 but Esau I have hated. I have made his mountain ranges a desolation, and *given* his inheritance to the jackals of *the* desert." [Rom 9:13]

4 If Edom says, "We are shattered, but we will return and rebuild *the* ruins," Yahweh of hosts says this: "They may build, but I will tear down; and they will be called a territory of wickedness, and the people *with* whom Yahweh is angry forever."

5 Your eyes will see *this*, and you will say, "Yahweh is great beyond the borders of Israel."

Israel Questions God's Charge of Disrespect

6 "A son honors *his* father, and a slave his master; but if I *am* a father, where *is* my honor, and if I *am* a master, where *is* my reverence?" says Yahweh of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. "But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'

7 *You are* presenting defiled food on my altar! But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' By saying *that* the table of Yahweh is despised!

8 When you offer a blind *animal* for sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer *the* lame and the one who is ill, is that not wrong? Present it, please, to your governor! Will he be pleased with you? Will he show you favor?" says Yahweh of hosts.

9 So then, implore the favor of God so that he will be gracious to us. "This is what you have done. Will he show favor to any of you?" says Yahweh of hosts.

10 "Who also among you will shut *the temple* doors so that you will not kindle fire in vain *on* my altar? I take no pleasure in you," says Yahweh of hosts, "and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

11 From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name *is* great among the nations, and in every place incense *is* being presented to my name, and a pure offering. For my name *is* great among the nations," says Yahweh of hosts.

12 "But you *are* profaning it by saying the table of the Lord *is* defiled, and its fruit—its food—is despised!

13 And you say, 'Look! *This is* a weariness,' and you sniff *with disdain* at it," says Yahweh of hosts. "And you bring *the* stolen, the lame, and the one that is sick—*this* you bring as the offering! Should I accept it from your hand?" says Yahweh.

14 "Cursed is the one who cheats, who has in his flock a male and vows *it*, but *instead* sacrifices a blemished one to the Lord! For I *am* a great king," says Yahweh of hosts, "and my name *is* awesome among the nations."

Warning to the Priests

2:1 "And so then, O priests, this command *is* for you:

2 If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart to give glory to my name," says Yahweh of hosts, "then I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings; moreover I have *already* cursed them because you are not taking it to heart.

3 Look! I *am* going to rebuke your offspring, and I will scatter offal on your faces, *the* offal of your religious feasts, and you will be carried to it.

4 "Then you will know that I have sent to you this command, that my covenant with Levi continues," says Yahweh of hosts.

5 "My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him. *This required* reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe before my name.

6 *The* instruction of truth was in his mouth, and wickedness was not found on his lips. In peace and in uprightness he walked with me, and he brought back many from sin.

7 For the lips of *the* priest should guard knowledge, and they should seek instruction from his mouth, for he *is* the messenger of Yahweh of hosts.

8 But you, you have turned from the way; you have caused many to stumble by *your* instruction; you have ruined the covenant of Levi," says Yahweh of hosts.

9 "And in turn I have made you despised and humbled before all the people, inasmuch as you *are* not keeping my way, but are favoring your own instruction."

God Charges Israel With Unfaithfulness

10 Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why *then* are we unfaithful to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

11 Judah has been faithless, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yahweh which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

12 May Yahweh cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, *the* one who is awake and *who* answers, and *the one who* brings an offering to Yahweh of hosts!

13 And this you do as well: *you* cover the altar of Yahweh *with* tears, *with* weeping and *with* groaning, because he no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.

14 But you ask, “For what reason?” Because Yahweh stands as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have been unfaithful, even though she *is* your marriage partner and your wife by covenant.

15 Did not one God make them? But a remnant of *the* spirit is his. And what does the one *God* desire? An offspring of God. You must be attentive to your spirit, and you must not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

16 “For I hate divorce,” says Yahweh, the God of Israel, “and he *who* covers his clothing *with* violence,” says Yahweh of hosts. “You must be attentive to your spirit and you must not be unfaithful.”

Israel Questions God’s Charge of Wearisome Words

17 You have wearied Yahweh with your words, but you ask, “With what have we wearied *him*?” *You have done so* when you say, “Everyone who does evil *is* good in the sight of Yahweh, and in them he delights,” or “Where *is* the God of justice?”

3:1 “Look! I *am* going to send my messenger, and he will prepare *the* way before me. And the Lord whom you *are* seeking will come suddenly to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant, *in* whom you *are* taking pleasure—look!—*he is* about to come,” says Yahweh of hosts. [[Matt 11:10](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#)]

2 And who *can* endure the day of his coming? And who *is* the one who can stand when he appears? For he *is* like a refiner’s fire, like launderers’ alkali.

3 He will sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the children of Levi, and he will refine them like gold and like silver, and they will present to Yahweh offerings in righteousness.

4 And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Yahweh, like *in the* days of old and like *in* former years.

5 “Then I will approach you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers, and against those who swear falsely, and against the oppressors of *the* hired worker *with his* wages, *the* widow and *the* orphan, and the abusers of *the* alien, and *yet* do not fear me,” says Yahweh of hosts.

6 “For I, Yahweh, have not changed, and you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

Israel Questions God’s Charge of Disobedience

7 From the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my rules, and have not kept *them*! Return to me and I will return to you,” says Yahweh of hosts, “but you say, ‘How shall we return?’

8 Will a human *dare to* rob God? Yet you *are* robbing me! And you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In the tithes and the contributions!

9 You *are* being cursed with *a* curse, for you *are* robbing me, the whole nation *of you*!

10 Bring the whole tithe to the storehouse, so that there will be food in my house, and test me please in this,” says Yahweh of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour forth for you an overflowing blessing.

11 I will rebuke the devourer for you; it will not destroy the fruit of your soil; your vine in the field will not be unfruitful,” says Yahweh of hosts.

12 “And all the nations will call you blessed, because you will be a land in which one takes joy,” says Yahweh of hosts.

Israel Questions God’s Charge of Hard Words

13 “Your words have been harsh against me,” says Yahweh. “But you say, ‘How have we spoken together against you?’

14 You have said, ‘*It is* useless to serve God! What *is the* gain if we keep his requirements, and if we walk as mourners before Yahweh of hosts?’

15 And now we *are* calling *the* arrogant blessed! Not only do those who do wickedness prosper; they also test God and they escape!”

16 Then those who revered Yahweh spoke with one another. And Yahweh listened attentively and heard, and a scroll of remembrance was written before him of those who revere Yahweh and ponder his name.

17 “They will be mine,” says Yahweh of hosts, “on the day that I *am* acting, *my* treasured possession. I will have compassion on them as a man has compassion on his son who serves him.

18 You will return and see *the difference* between *the* righteous and *the* wicked, between *the one who* serves God and the one who does not serve him.

Remember the Coming “Day of the Lord”

4:1 “For look! The day *is* about to come, burning like an oven, and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says Yahweh of hosts. “It will not leave behind for them root or branch.

2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, with healing in its wings, and you will go out and leap like fattened calves.

3 You will trample down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I *am* going to act,” says Yahweh of hosts.

4 “Remember the instruction of my servant Moses, which I commanded him at Horeb to all Israel, the rules and regulations.

5 Look! I *am* going to send to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Yahweh! [[Matt 17:10](#); [Mark 9:11](#)]

6 And he will bring back *the* hearts of *the* fathers to *the* sons, and the hearts of *the* sons to their fathers, so that I will not come and strike the land *with* a ban.”

Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem (c. 429/428 BC)

Nehemiah 13:1–31

Ammonites and Moabites Expelled from the Temple (occurred during Nehemiah's absence)

1 On that day the book of Moses was read in the hearing of the people and it was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God

2 because they did not come to meet the Israelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them in order to curse them—but our God changed the curse into a blessing.

3 So it happened when they heard the law that they separated all of the foreign people from Israel.

Tobiah's Presence in the Temple Chambers (occurred during Nehemiah's absence)

4 Before this, Eliashib the priest who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God—the one related to Tobiah—

5 prepared for *Tobiah* a large chamber where they had formerly put the grain offering, the frankincense, the *temple* objects, tithes of grain, wine, and oil commanded for the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the offerings of the priests.

Nehemiah Cleanses the Temple of Tobiah's Influence

6 During all of this, I was not in Jerusalem because in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. At the end of *some* days I asked permission from the king *to leave*.

7 So I came to Jerusalem. And I came to learn of the wrong that Eliashib had done for Tobiah by making him a room in the courtyard of the house of God.

8 It was very displeasing for me, and I threw all of the objects from the house of Tobiah outside of the chamber.

9 And I spoke *in order*, and they cleansed the chambers. Then I returned the objects of the house of God—the grain offering and the frankincense.

Nehemiah Restores the Tithes to the Levites

10 And then I came to learn that the food of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, the doers of the work, had gone back each to his field.

11 So I quarreled with the prefects, and I said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them and set them at their station.

12 So all of Judah brought the tithe of grain, new wine, and olive oil into the storehouses.

13 I appointed as treasurer over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, Pedaiah from the Levites, and as their hand Hanan son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful. *The responsibility given* to them was to distribute to their brothers.

14 Remember me, my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my loyal acts which I have done in the house of my God and in his service.

Nehemiah Enforces Observance of the Sabbath

15 In those days I saw in Judah *people* treading the wine press on the Sabbath, bringing in heaps *of grain* and loading them on donkeys along with wine, grapes and figs, and every kind of burden and bringing *it all* to Jerusalem on the day of the Sabbath. And I warned them at that time against selling food.

16 Tyrian men who lived in *Jerusalem* brought fish and every kind of merchandise and sold *it* on the Sabbath to the descendants of Judah and in Jerusalem.

17 So I quarreled with the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the day of the Sabbath?”

18 Did not your ancestors do this also, and our God brought on us all of this disaster and on this city *too*? Now you are adding fierce wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath!”

19 So when it became dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors be shut and said that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I appointed some of my young men over the gates *to prevent* any goods being brought in on the day of the Sabbath.

20 So the merchants and the sellers of merchandise spent the night outside of Jerusalem once or twice.

21 But I warned them and said to them, “Why are you spending the night opposite the wall? If you do *it again*, I will lay hands against you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath.

22 And then I told two Levites that they must purify themselves and come to guard the gates in order to consecrate the day of the

Sabbath. Remember this also, my God, and take pity on me according to the greatness of your loyal love.

Nehemiah Punishes Those Who Had Married Foreign Women

23 Also in those days I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

24 Half of their children spoke Ashdodite and could not speak Judean, but *only* the tongues of other nations.

25 So I quarreled with them and cursed them and beat some of their men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath by God: “Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

26 Did not King Solomon of Israel sin in this way? And among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Yet the foreign women made even him sin.

27 Should we listen to you all and do this great evil, acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?”

28 One from the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, *who* was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonote *was there*. I chased him away from me.

29 Remember them, my God, because of their defilements of the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

30 So I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established responsibilities for the priests and Levites, each in his own work,

31 a contribution of the wood offering at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

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Chronological Notes

1) Malachi.¹

- A) Malachi’s prophecy is difficult to date because there are no references to any dateable persons or events. Thus we must draw our conclusions from clues in the text and other external witnesses. Malachi’s place at the end of the twelve Minor Prophets in the Hebrew Bible and modern translations argues for a late date. The Talmud grouped Malachi with Haggai and Zechariah as postexilic prophets.²
- B) Malachi’s reference to “your governor” (1:8) indicates that he wrote after 538 BC when Cyrus the Persian allowed the Jews to return to their land, which was under Persian control. The word translated “governor” is *pehah*, a Persian title (cf. Ezra 5:3, 6, 14; 6:6–7, 13; Dan 3:2–3, 27; 6:7). Zerubbabel bore this title (Hag 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21), as did Nehemiah (Neh 5:14; 12:26). Malachi must have written after the temple had been rebuilt since he referred to worship there (1:6–14; 2:7–9, 13; 3:7–10). This would imply a date after 515 BC when work on the temple was complete.
- C) Since Malachi addressed many of the same matters that Nehemiah tried to reform, it is tempting to date Malachi during Nehemiah’s governorship. Both Malachi and Nehemiah dealt with priestly laxity (Mal 1:6; Neh 13:4–9), neglect of tithes (Mal 3:7–12; Neh 13:10–13), and intermarriage between Israelites and foreigners (Mal 2:10–16; Neh 13:23–28). In the twelfth year of his governorship, Nehemiah returned to Persia for an unknown period of time (Neh 5:14; 13:6). When he returned, he dealt decisively with many of the issues raised by Malachi. Thus I have chosen to place Malachi during the time period when Nehemiah was back in Persia.³

¹ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Malachi,” Online: <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/malachi.pdf>.

² *Yoma* 9b; *Sukkah* 44a; *Rosh Hashannah* 19b; *Megillah* 3a, 15a, et al.

³ E.g., Robert L. Alden, “Malachi,” in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, pp. 701–2. Other commentators have suggested a wide range of dates. For example, Craig Blasing suggested a date between 450 and 430 BC. Eugene Merrill preferred a date between 480 and 470 BC. Douglas Stuart believed Malachi wrote about 460 BC. R. K. Harrison and John Bright estimated a date close to 450 BC. Gleason Archer Jr. and Ray Clendenen concluded that Malachi wrote about 435 BC. Hobart Freeman was more specific: shortly after 433 BC. Leon Wood was quite general: during the last half of the fifth century BC, though contemporaneously with Nehemiah.