

# Through the Bible Book by Book

## Old Testament

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### Malachi

**Theme:** In Nehemiah we read the last page of Old Testament history; in the book of the prophet Malachi, Nehemiah's contemporary, we read the last page of Old Testament prophecy.

Malachi, the last of the prophets, testifies, as do his predecessors, to the sad fact that Israel has failed.

He presents us a picture of a people outwardly religious, but inwardly indifferent and insincere, a people to whom the service of the Lord has become an empty formality, performed by a corrupt priesthood whom they did not respect.

Under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah the people were willing to acknowledge their faults and make amends; but now, so hardened have they become, that to the charges of the Lord they offer insolent denials (1:1, 2; 2:17; 3:7). Worse still, many profess a skepticism as to the existence of a GOD of judgment, and others question the value of serving the Lord (2:17; 3:14, 15).

As a ray of light shining upon this dark scene is the promise of the advent of the Messiah, who will come to the deliverance of the faithful remnant and to the judgment of the nation. The book closes with a prophecy of the coming of Elijah, Messiah's forerunner, and then the curtain drops on Old Testament revelation, not to be lifted again until four; hundred years later, when the angel of the Lord announces the coming of Him who is to go before the coming One in spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

We shall sum up the theme as follows: the last prophecy of the Old Testament, a revelation of a rebellious and insincere people, of a loyal remnant, and of a coming Messiah who will judge and purify the nation.

Notice the recurrence of the word "**wherein**" which expresses the defiant attitude of the people in regard to the Lord's accusations.

**Author:** Of the personal history of Malachi nothing is known. It is believed that he prophesied during the time of Nehemiah and supported him, as Haggai and Zechariah supported Zerubbabel. "The book of Malachi fits the situation round which Nehemiah worked as snugly as a bone fits a socket."

The prophet denounced the very evils that existed in Nehemiah's time (Compare Nehemiah 13:10-12 and Malachi 3:8-10; Nehemiah 13:29 and Malachi 2:4-8; Nehemiah 13:23-27 and Malachi 2:10-16).

He wrote so much about CHRIST that one has said, "Old Testament prophecy expired with the Gospel on its tongue."

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### I. Warning and Rebuke: Messages to the Rebellious (Chs. 1:1 to 3:15).

1. A message to the whole nation (1:1-5) His love for them, and their ingratitude. The people insolently question the Lord's love for them, evidently thinking of their past afflictions, but forgetting that these were the chastenings of the Almighty to purify them.

As a proof of His love to the nation, the Lord points to His gratuitous election of their father Jacob and the rejection of his brother. (Note the word "hate," does not signify hatred in the sense that we now understand it, but is here used in the sense of rejecting. Compare Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37 where the word "hate" means to love with a lesser affection).

Edom is forever rejected of GOD and will be forever desolate. But Israel, forever chosen of GOD, will live to see Edom's desolation, and will glorify GOD's' grace and love (vv. 4, 5).

2. Messages to the priests (1:6 to 2:9). The following sins are rebuked:

(a) Lack of reverence for the Lord (1:6). Note the spirit of self-satisfied insensibility to sin, revealed in the reply of the priests: "**Wherein have we despised thee?**" This attitude is manifest in all of the answers of people and priests to the Lord's reproofs.

(b) The offering of blemished sacrifices (1:7-12). Darius and his successors had probably liberally supplied the priests with victims for the sacrifices (Ezra 6:8-10), yet they presented none but the worst. They offered to the Lord that which they would not have dared to offer to their governor (v. 8). But though polluted sacrifices are offered in Palestine, yet among the heathen there are and will be those who will bring a pure offering before the Lord (v. 11).

(c) The performing of GOD's service in the spirit of indifference and discontent (1:11, 12). They regarded GOD's service as irksome, and dishonored it by presenting the most worthless offerings.

(d) The violation of the Levitical covenant (2:1-9). The Lord mentions those qualities that the covenant required in a priest; namely, a close walk with the Lord, zeal to turn many from iniquity, and ability to teach (vv. 5-7). In all these qualities the priesthood of Malachi's time were sadly lacking (v. 8).

3. Messages to the people (2:11 to 3:15). The following sins are rebuked:

(a) Sins of the family (2:10-16). Many of the people had divorced their Israelitish wives in order to marry foreign women (Compare Nehemiah 13:23-28).

(b) Skepticism (2:17). This verse forms the transition to 3:1. The skeptics of the day were insinuating that GOD delighted in evil-doers since the latter seemed to prosper. Then, if that was the case, why should they serve GOD (3:14, 15)? Where is the GOD of judgment, they ask. The answer is forthcoming (3:1-6). The Lord whom they seek (3:1) (whom they challenge to appear) will come suddenly (when they least expect it) to His temple and will visit judgment on priests and people. Not because the Lord had changed was judgment delayed, but because He had not changed in regard to His covenant promises and because of His unchanging mercy (v. 6).

(c) The withholding of the tithe (3:7-12; compare Nehemiah 13:10-14).

## **II. Predictions and Promises: Messages to the Faithful (Chs. 3:16 to 4:6)**

1. A message to the righteous (3:16 to 4:3). In the darkest days of Israel's apostasy there has always been a remnant that have remained faithful to GOD. In Malachi's day, when the fire of religion was burning low, these faithful ones gathered to keep the holy flame alive. As the kings of Persia kept a record of those who had rendered them service, so that they might reward them (Esther 2:23; 6:1, 2; Ezra 4:5), so GOD is keeping His record (v. 16).

These loyal ones are His jewels, His own peculiar treasure, whom He will preserve from the day of tribulation. In that day both the righteous and the wicked will be recompensed, and then will be silenced the skeptic's sneer (v. 18, compare 2:17; 3:14, 15). The Sun of righteousness will rise, to burn the wicked, but to shed healing rays upon the righteous (4:1-3).

2. The last exhortation of the Old Testament (4:4): "**Remember ye the law of Moses.**" Until Messiah came revelation was to cease temporarily.

The people are to remember the law, for, in the absence of the living prophets they are likely to forget it. The law is to be their rule of life and conduct during the four hundred years of silence intervening between the last Old Testament prophet and the coming of the Prophet of prophets.

3. The last prophecy of the Old Testament (4:5, 6). Before the coming of the great day of wrath, GOD will send the forerunner of the Messiah, Elijah, who will prepare the people for His coming. This prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14; 17:11, 12). That it will have a future fulfillment is probable, for as the Messiah had a forerunner at His first advent, so He may have one at His second.

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