

Commentary on Malachi Chapters 1 and 2, by Chuck Smith 9.18.24

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September Memory Verse, 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (NKJV)

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

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Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Malachi

Chapter 1

Now let's turn to Malachi, the final word of God in the Old Testament period. God's final message before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Who was Malachi, where he came from, we just don't know. Some believe that the name of Malachi was just an assumed name, not the true name of the writer. But there is no real evidence to back up that belief. But the name Malachi... remember this morning I told you there were meanings in the names. That they just didn't name a child any name out of the dictionary, but they looked for the meaning of a name, and they named the child for the meaning of the name. Malachi means "my messenger." So Malachi was God's messenger, the last messenger of the Old Testament period. He doesn't give any background concerning himself as some of the other minor prophets do, telling you where they came from and who their fathers were. It just is,

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi ([Mal 1:1](#)).

So that's your introduction to the book. Declaring the author and to whom the book is sent. Malachi, but the author, really, it's the word of the Lord. The messenger, Malachi, addressed the people of Israel.

What is God's first word of the final word?

I have loved you ([Mal 1:2](#)),

What a glorious thing for God to say to a person, "I have loved you." Now that isn't a past tense. That is past and present, "I continue to love you. I have loved you." God's love never ceases. "I have loved you,"

saith the LORD ([Mal 1:2](#)).

But Israel in their cold spiritual condition responds,

Wherein have you loved us? ([Mal 1:2](#))

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Rather than responding in warmth to God, there is the challenge of that love. Now many people today still are guilty of challenging God's love. So many times a statement is begun with the words, "If God loves me then why..." Oftentimes the circumstances of my life, which seem to be very difficult or adverse, cause me, at times, to challenge God's love.

Now you find that today in Israel there is a tremendous challenge to this statement by the people. If you would go over there today and proclaim to the people in Israel, "God loves the people of Israel," ninety percent of them would say, "If God loves the Jew then how come six million of them were killed by Hitler?" I've had them say to me, "We don't need that kind of love." But God declares, "I have loved you, saith the Lord."

We think of love as some weak kind of thing that just is totally indulgent. But the Bible tells us that if you as a parent totally indulge your child, if you do not correct your child, you really aren't demonstrating love for that child, but you hate your child. The failure for you as a parent to discipline your child is not a sign of love, but a disregard, of hatred. God, because He loves us, disciplines us. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." But we're so used to thinking of love in the sickly sweet Hollywood sentimentality of the full moon and the beach in Hawaii and the guitars in the background and the waves gently coming up on the sand, you know. This whole kind of scene. That we don't understand the nature of true love and of real love. That's Hollywood. True love is strong, strong enough to rebuke when rebuke is necessary, strong enough to chasten when chastening is for the best good. Oftentimes chastening is necessary for our best good.

So God in His love for us has that strength of love that brings discipline when we are doing those self-destructive acts. Now oftentimes it is during the discipline that we challenge the love of God. "If God loves me, then why is this happening to me?" It's happening to you because He does love you, and He's averting some tragedy down the road. You should be thankful. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth."

So there was the challenge, "Wherein does God love us?" God answers that challenge by pointing out the fact that He chose Jacob over Esau. Now they were twin brothers, and Esau was the elder. According to tradition, the blessings should have gone to Esau. The birthright should've gone to Esau. Though they were twins, because he was born first, the right of the birthright was his, and the blessing was his. But God reversed things. God gave to Jacob the birthright and the blessing and the promise. Being descendants of Jacob rather than Esau was the proof of God's love for Israel.

Were they not brothers? the LORD said: and yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau ([Mal 1:2-3](#)),

Now a lot of times people get hung up on this idea of God saying He hated somebody. Actually, it is a term that means love in a lesser degree. "I loved Jacob, but I loved Esau in a lesser degree." The word "hates Esau" is a rather difficult translation.

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but I laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever ([Mal 1:3-4](#)).

So the Edomites were to be destroyed. God was going to cast them down, though they tried to repatriate and recover, they were unable to do so. The Edomites were lost from history. Herod was the last of the Edomites, the king Herod. Then from there, their ethnic identity is lost in history.

The Lord said,

Your eyes see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel ([Mal 1:5](#)).

From the border of Edom, the border of wickedness, it'll be desolation. But God will be magnified from the border of Israel.

Now the Lord brings out here an interesting thing. He says,

A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I am your father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my reverence? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised his name? ([Mal 1:5-6](#))

So God says, "Look, a father receives honor from his son. In fact, under the law it says, 'Honor your father and your mother.' And the master receives reverence and respect from his slaves." God is saying, "Look, if I'm your Father, then where is the honor that you should be giving Me? If I am your Master, then why aren't you respecting or reverencing Me?"

Then the Lord speaks out about the priesthood. He said,

O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Where have we despised your name? [God said] In that you have offered polluted bread upon my altar; and you say, Where have we polluted thee? [God said] In that you say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? offer it to your governor; and see how he thinks about it ([Mal 1:6-8](#)).

God said, "You wouldn't offer that kind of lame sick stuff to your governor, and yet, you offer it to Me." It's amazing how many times God gets the castoffs. You know, "I don't know what to do with it. I don't want to send it to the dump. I'll just give it to the church." The castoffs.

God speaks of His disdain for it, "Offering Me polluted offerings, offering Me the lambs that are sick, the lambs that are lame, the lambs that are blind." "Can't do anything else

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with it, give it to God; use it for sacrifice." When God in the law said that they were to offer the firstfruits. When they offered a lamb, that was to be without spot or blemish. They were to offer, really, unto God the sacrifices that were the best that they had.

God said, "Will the governor be pleased? Will he accept the person for that sick lame sacrifice he's trying to offer? Of course not."

Now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this has been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts ([Mal 1:9](#)).

Then the Lord said,

Who is there among you that would shut the doors [for nothing] for nought? neither do you kindle a fire on my altar for nought ([Mal 1:10](#)).

God is saying actually, "I would just as soon that someone would close the doors of the temple so that you wouldn't offer Me any more of these sacrifices that are nothing. Don't bother coming. If that's all you have to offer, forget it. I just wish that someone would close the doors of the temple so they wouldn't be offering Me anymore of this junk. I can do without it." Is the idea behind the Hebrew text.

I have no pleasure [God said] in you ([Mal 1:10](#)),

He said, "These things don't please Me. I don't have any pleasure in your junk."

neither will I accept the offering from you ([Mal 1:10](#)).

Gentiles. The priesthood has been more or less corrupted.

For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts ([Mal 1:11](#)).

So that promise which is yet future in the Kingdom Age, when Jesus shall reign. When every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God the Father. When [Psalm 2](#) is fulfilled and the Father has said to His Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give you the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy dwelling place." When that glorious day has come, "From the rising of the sun, even to the going down thereof, the name of the Lord shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, a pure offering."

Now we are told in the book of Revelation, chapter 5, that when Jesus takes the scroll out of the right hand of Him who is sitting upon the throne, that the twenty-four elders come forth with little golden bowls filled with incense that they offer before the throne of God. The Bible tells us that the incense is the prayer of the saints.

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Now the offering of incense is a symbolic act. The sweet savor, the sweet savory smell going up is a symbolic act.

Now God says concerning the Gentiles, "They will be offering up of these sacrifices; My name shall be great."

But [He said] you have profaned it ([Mal 1:12](#)),

That is, you've profaned the name of God, the name of the Lord.

in that you say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible ([Mal 1:12](#)).

Now, they had begun to take a very bad attitude towards their service to God, and their worship of God. It had become a labor. It had become a burden to them. It is tragic when people are serving God out of a sense of obligation or pressure, or giving to God out of the sense of pressure.

God doesn't want you to resent anything. That's why Paul the apostle in the New Testament said, "Let every man as he has purposed in his own heart set aside that portion that he wants to give to God" ([II Corinthians 9:7](#)). For your giving should never be out of constraint. It should never be through pressure, for God loves a cheerful, and the word in the Greek is hilarious giver. Now whatever you can give to God hilariously, give. What you can't give to God hilariously, keep. Don't pollute. God says, "You polluted the whole thing." Why? Because of the attitude of your heart when you're giving to God, your attitude of that is contemptible. "Oh, I've got to do that again." None of my giving to God should ever create within me a contempt. If it is, then I shouldn't be doing it. God loves a cheerful, hilarious giver.

You said, O what a weariness it is! ([Mal 1:13](#))

"Oh, do we have to go to church again tonight? Oh no! There's a neat program coming on T.V. and I've got to watch it. If I'm not there, they're going to be calling me. I don't want them to call me. I can't stand it." "Weariness to Me!" Oh, what a sad, sad state of spiritual affairs when the things of God become worrisome. Tragic.

But if serving God ever becomes weariness to you, then it's time to get out, time to do something else. Surely you should not be inflicting yourself upon others, if you yourself have become weary doing the work of the Lord. You say, "Oh, what weariness it is!"

and you've snuffed at it, and you've brought that which was torn, that which was lame, that which was sick; thus you brought an offering: and should I accept it? saith the LORD. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and vows, and sacrifices unto the Lord a corrupt thing ([Mal 1:13-14](#)):

God pronounces a curse upon that man that would make a promise to God and then substitute on it, and give God, sacrifice something that which is corrupted.

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for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is awesome among the heathen ([Mal 1:14](#)).

Chapter 2

Now He addresses Himself to the priests.

And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. And if you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart ([Mal 2:1-2](#)).

Now, in order to get a real background to Malachi, you need to read again the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, because Malachi was prophesying during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. This was the time when the children of Israel had returned from their Babylonian captivity and were starting to rebuild the nation. We remember how they read to the people the law of the Lord, and how that the people had begun to put away their wives and began to marry the wives from the cities of Ashdod and Ammon and the Moabites. Malachi will come down on this pretty soon, but you get a historic background to Malachi in Nehemiah and Ezra, which you should reread just to put the whole prophecy in perspective.

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it ([Mal 2:3](#)).

God isn't really very gentle, is He?

And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name ([Mal 2:4-5](#)).

Now God established the covenant of the priesthood with the tribe of Levi, because of the fear of the Lord, the reverence that he had towards God. The covenant was of life and of peace. God's covenant with man is that of life and of peace. God has promised to you eternal life and the peace of God which passes human understanding. These are the benefits of our covenant with God. This is the covenant that He had made with Levi because of Levi's reverence for Him.

The law of truth was in his mouth, iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and in fairness, and did turn many away from iniquity ([Mal 2:6](#)).

Of course, that was the duty of the priests, to walk before the Lord honestly, in righteousness, in peace.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts ([Mal 2:7](#)).

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But ye are departed out of the way; [that is, the priests] you have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts ([Mal 2:8](#)).

Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people ([Mal 2:9](#)),

Now, what happened is the people turned against the priesthood, and they began to treat the priests contemptibly, and rightfully so. It is interesting in Brazil how that the people have turned against the ministers. Treating them with contempt. You can't blame the people; you have to blame the ministers who were derelict in their duty of bringing the people the truth of God's Word and of God's light, and foisting upon them some social action program. There is a place for social actions, but not the church. Our place is to proclaim God's truth to the people. It is the changed people who change the society.

"Therefore have I made you contemptible and base,"

according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in [your administering of] the law. Have we not all one father? is there not just one God who has created us? then why are we dealing so treacherously against our brothers? ([Mal 2:9-10](#))

Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god ([Mal 2:11](#)).

So the Lord is here speaking about this treacherous thing that was going on, in that the men of Judah who had returned to rebuild the nation had begun to divorce their own wives of their youth. They began to marry these girls from Ashdod, that is, of the Philistines, from Ammon. That is the area of Moab, Jordan today. Leaving their wives and marrying these young gals from these foreign nations who were strangers to God and to the covenants of God. So He speaks about the treacherous dealings of these husbands.

The LORD will cut off the man that does this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles [or tents] of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. And this have you done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, and weeping, and crying out, inasmuch as he regards not the offering any more, or receives it with good will at your hand ([Mal 2:12-13](#)).

You say, Well why? Because the LORD is the witness between you and your wife, the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant ([Mal 2:14](#)).

You made a vow. You covenanted, "Till death do us part." The wife of your covenant.

And did he not make the two of you one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore [and why] one? That he might seek a godly seed ([Mal 2:15](#)).

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God was seeking to preserve a godly seed for the nation Israel, in order that they might bring forth His Son into the world. That's why He commanded them not to marry outside of the race.

Therefore [He said] take heed to your spirit, let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth ([Mal 2:15](#)).

For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hates divorcing: for one covers violence with his garments, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously ([Mal 2:16](#)).

So God sets Himself against divorcing. He said, "I hate it." The Lord said there was only one real cause for divorce, and that was adultery, fornication.

Then the Lord said,

You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, Where did we weary him? [He said] When you say that, Every one is good in the eyes of the LORD ([Mal 2:17](#)),

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Title

The title is derived from the prophecy's author, Malachi. With this last work in the Minor Prophets, God closes the OT canon historically and prophetically.

Author and Date

Some have suggested that the book was written anonymously, noting that the name, meaning "my messenger" or "the LORD's messenger," could be a title rather than a proper name. It is pointed out that the name occurs nowhere else in the OT, nor is any background material provided about the author. However, since all other prophetic books have historically identified their author in the introductory heading, this suggests that Malachi was indeed the name of the last OT writing prophet in Israel. Jewish tradition identifies him as a member of the Great Synagogue that collected and preserved the Scriptures.

Looking solely at internal evidence, the date of the prophecy points to the late fifth century B.C., most likely during Nehemiah's return to Persia ca. 433–424 B.C. (cf. [Neh. 5:14](#); [13:6](#)). Sacrifices were being made at the second temple ([1:7–10](#); [3:8](#)), which was finished in 516 B.C. (cf. [Ezra 6:13–15](#)). Many years had passed since then as the priests had increasingly become complacent and corrupt ([1:6–2:9](#)). Malachi's reference to "governor" ([1:8](#)) speaks of the time of Persian dominance in Judah when Nehemiah was revisiting Persia ([Neh. 13:6](#)), while his emphasis on the law ([4:4](#)) coincides with a similar focus by Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. [Ezra 7:14](#), [25](#), [26](#); [Neh. 8:18](#)). They shared other concerns as well, such as marriages to foreign wives ([2:11–15](#); cf. [Ezra 9](#), [10](#); [Neh. 13:23–27](#)), withholding of tithes ([3:8–10](#); cf. [Neh. 13:10–14](#)), and social injustice ([3:5](#); cf. [Neh. 5:1–13](#)). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 445 B.C. to rebuild the wall, and

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returned to Persia in 433 B.C. He later returned to Israel (ca. 424 B.C.) to deal with the sins Malachi described (Neh. 13:6). So it is likely that Malachi was written during the period of Nehemiah's absence, almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy. Similar to Rev. 2, 3, in which Christ writes what He thinks about the conditions of the churches, here God writes through Malachi to impress upon Israel His thoughts about the nation.

Background and Setting

Only 50,000 exiles had returned to Judah from Babylon (538–536 B.C.). The temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel (516 B.C.) and the sacrificial system renewed. Ezra had returned in 458 B.C., followed by Nehemiah in 445 B.C. After being back in the land of Palestine for only a century, the ritual of the Jews' religious routine led to hard-heartedness toward God's great love for them and to widespread departure from His law by both people and priest. Malachi rebuked and condemned these abuses, forcefully indicting the people and calling them to repentance. When Nehemiah returned from Persia the second time (ca. 424 B.C.), he vigorously rebuked them for these abuses in the temple and priesthood, for the violation of the Sabbath rest, and for the unlawful divorce of their Jewish wives so they could marry Gentile women (cf. Neh. 13).

As over two millennia of OT history since Abraham concluded, none of the glorious promises of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants had been fulfilled in their ultimate sense. Although there had been a few high points in Israel's history, e.g., Joshua, David, and Josiah, the Jews had seemingly lost all opportunity to receive God's favor since less than 100 years after returning from captivity, they had already sunk to a depth of sin that exceeded the former iniquities which brought on the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations. Beyond this, the long anticipated Messiah had not arrived and did not seem to be in sight.

So, Malachi wrote the capstone prophecy of the OT in which he delivered God's message of judgment on Israel for their continuing sin and God's promise that one day in the future, when the Jews would repent, Messiah would be revealed and God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. There were over 400 years of divine silence, with only Malachi's words ringing condemnation in their ears, before another prophet arrived with a message from God. That was John the Baptist preaching, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2). Messiah had come.

Historical and Theological Themes

The Lord repeatedly referred to His covenant with Israel (cf. 2:4, 5, 8, 10, 14; 3:1), reminding them, from His opening words, of their unfaithfulness to His love/marriage relationship with them (cf. 1:2–5). God's love for His people pervades the book. Apparently the promises by the former prophets of the coming Messiah who would bring final deliverance and age-long blessings, and the encouragement from the recent promises (ca. 500 B.C.) of Haggai and Zechariah, had only made the people and their

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leaders more resolute in their complacency. They thought that this love relationship could be maintained by formal ritual alone, no matter how they lived. In a penetrating rebuke of both priests (1:6–2:9) and people (2:10–16), the prophet reminds them that the Lord's coming, which they were seeking (3:1), would be in judgment to refine, purify, and purge (3:2, 3). The Lord not only wanted outward compliance to the law, but an inward acceptance as well (cf. Matt. 23:23). The prophet assaults the corruption, wickedness, and false security by directing his judgments at their hypocrisy, infidelity, compromise, divorce, false worship, and arrogance.

Malachi set forth his prophecy in the form of a dispute, employing the question-and-answer method. The Lord's accusations against His people were frequently met by cynical questions from the people (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13). At other times, the prophet presented himself as God's advocate in a lawsuit, posing rhetorical questions to the people based on their defiant criticisms (1:6, 8, 9; 2:10, 15; 3:2).

Malachi indicted the priests and the people on at least 6 counts of willful sin: 1) repudiating God's love (1:2–5); 2) refusing God His due honor (1:6–2:9); 3) rejecting God's faithfulness (2:10–16); 4) redefining God's righteousness (2:17–3:5); 5) robbing God's riches (3:6–12); and 6) reviling God's grace (3:13–15). There are 3 interludes in which Malachi rendered God's judgment: 1) to the priests (2:1–9); 2) to the nation (3:1–6); and 3) to the remnant (3:16–4:6).