

Introduction to Malachi
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Author:

The author of the book is the prophet Malachi (Heb. מְלַאֲכִי *Malaki*), whose name means *my messenger* (Mal 1:1).

Audience:

Malachi's message was to Israel (Mal 1:1); specifically, a Judean audience familiar with temple activity (Mal 2:11).

Date of Ministry:

Malachi uses a Persian word for governor (מְשָׁלָה *pechah* – Mal 1:8), which implies Persian rule (538-333 B.C.). Furthermore, the temple was operational (Mal 1:6-11; 2:1-3; 3:1, 10), placing the writing after 516 B.C., as a post-exilic book. The religious and social problems addressed by Malachi seem to coincide with issues addressed by Ezra (Ezra chapters 9 & 10) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah chapters 10 & 13). It's possible Malachi prophesied during the time when Nehemiah, Judah's governor, was out of town for a few years (Neh 13:6, ca. 432 B.C.). If correct, Malachi's ministry occurred nearly a hundred years after Haggai and Zechariah. Malachi is the last of the OT writing prophets.

Historical Background:

Malachi addressed some of the issues surrounding Israel's neglect of the covenant; specifically, the promises the people had previously made under Nehemiah's leadership to keep the Sabbath, fund the temple, offer proper sacrifices, and give tithes of food (Neh 10:28-39). When Nehemiah was present, the people obeyed. However, Nehemiah left for a period of time, maybe a few years, visiting Artaxerxes, king of Babylon (Neh 13:6); and during his absence the people fell back into sin, bringing unbelieving foreigners into the temple, not supporting the priests, failing to keep the Sabbath and marrying unbelieving foreign women (Neh 13:1-31). Malachi addresses similar issues.

The conditions described in the Book of Nehemiah are the very things Malachi deals with in his book: poor crops and a faltering economy (Mal. 3:11), intermarriage with the heathen (2:11), defilement of the priesthood (1:6ff), oppression of the poor (3:5), lack of support for the temple (vv. 8–10), and a general disdain of religion (v. 13ff). It was a low time spiritually for Judah, and they needed to hear the Word of God.¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Amazed*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 137.

Life was not easy for the returnees during the ministry of the fifth-century restoration prophets. The people continued to live under Gentile (Persian) sovereignty even though they were back in their own land. Harvests were poor, and locust plagues were a problem (3:11). Even after Ezra's reforms and Nehemiah's amazing success in motivating the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, most of the people remained cold-hearted toward Yahweh. Priests and people were still not observing the Mosaic Law as commanded, as is clear from references in the book to sacrifices, tithes, and offerings (e.g., 1:6; 3:5). Foreign cultures had made deep inroads into the values and practices of God's people. The Israelites still intermarried with Gentiles (2:11), and divorces were quite common (2:16). The spiritual, ethical, and moral tone of the nation was low.²

Malachi's Message:

Malachi structures his message to address seven sins within the nation. In each of the sins mentioned, Malachi's readers responded by asking, "How have we done that?" (Mal 1:2, 6, 2:13-14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13). The questions reveal their spiritual insensitivity to his charges. The priests were the major focus of Malachi's message, as they had failed to teach and lead the nation in spiritual matters pertaining to temple sacrifices. "It is possible to attend the place of worship, to go through the motions of worship, and even to make sacrifices of worship, and still not worship God."³ Throughout, the Mosaic Law was the standard by which Israel's behavior was measured, calling them back to obedience. Overall, Malachi's message was that covenant faithfulness would restore the nation's blessings.

Outline:

1. God loves His people, Israel, and subdues her enemies (1:1-5).
2. God rejects the corrupt worship that defiles His sanctuary (1:6-14).
3. The priests failed to teach the Law to God's people (2:1-9).
4. Many Israelites had married unbelieving foreign wives and divorced the wives of their youth (2:10-16).
5. God will send His messengers who will prepare the way for redemption and judgment (2:17-3:5).
6. God's people failed to support the priesthood with their tithes (3:6-12).
7. A contrast between the wicked and the righteous, and a promise of a future leader who will restore the nation to God (3:13-18; 4:1-6).

² Tom Constable, *Introduction to Malachi, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), NP.

³ *Ibid.*, NP.

Malachi 1:1-5

The oracle [מַסָּא *massa* – *oracle, burden*] of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. ² “I have loved you,” [love = God selected Israel for a personal relationship; cf. [Hos 11:1, 3-4, 8-9](#); [Isa 43:4](#)] says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” [challenging God’s statement] “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. [see [Gen 25:21-26](#)] “Yet I have loved Jacob; ³ but I have hated Esau [love & hate = choose & reject; cf. [Deu 7:8](#); [Jer 31:3](#); [Luke 14:26](#)], and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.” ⁴ Though Edom says, “We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins” [advancement through self-effort]; thus says the LORD of hosts, “They may build [attain a measure of success], but I will tear down [override and frustrate their activity]; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever.” ⁵ Your eyes will see this and you will say, “The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!”

Summary:

Malachi chapter one reveals God’s love for Israel in that He chose her above others to be in a special relationship with Him (Mal 1:1-5). Malachi’s message is called an “oracle”; however, the Hebrew word מַסָּא *massa* also connotes a *burden*. “In the prophetic books *maśśā*’ introduces messages of a threatening nature 27 times (e.g., [Isa 13:1](#); [14:28](#); [15:1](#); [Nah 1:1](#); [Hab 1:1](#); [Zec 9:1](#); [12:1](#)). Standing alone at the beginning of Malachi, the word *maśśā*’ gives this prophet’s entire message a sense of anxiety and foreboding.”⁴ Furthermore, Malachi’s message was not his own; rather, it was “the word of the LORD”, which meant it came with the stamp of divine authority (cf. [1 Th 2:13](#)). Six times in this pericope God’s covenant name, יהוה *YHVH*, is used; and the message was to Israel, His covenant people. Since God is always faithful to keep His word, any problems in the relationship must belong to His people. And the message was “through Malachi”, the Lord’s instrument of communication. Interestingly, the prophet’s opening message to Israel was an announcement of God’s love for them, as the Lord declared, “I have loved you” (Mal 1:2a). “The verb אָהַב means ‘to love,’ very often with the special sense of choosing. If God loved Israel, it meant he chose them for himself; there was affection for sure, but divine election lay behind it all.”⁵ God’s love for His people means He has chosen them for a special relationship, that He is committed to them (even when they are not faithful, see [2 Tim 2:13](#)), and always seeks their best interest. Furthermore, His love for His people is rooted in His sovereignty and integrity, not in the beauty or worth of those whom He loved ([Deu 7:6-8](#)); and Israel should have responded to God’s love by walking with him and following His direction ([Deu 6:4-9](#)). This is true for believers who are in relationship with Jesus, who said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word”

⁴ Craig A. Blaising, “Malachi,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1575.

⁵ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 34.

(John 14:23). God's love for Israel is seen in that He has chosen them to be His covenant people (Mal 1:2a), which meant they were to walk with Him and enjoy His blessings. But His people challenged His love for them, asking, "How have You loved us?" (Mal 1:2b). Their question could possibly have been asked out of ignorance, but more likely out of defiance, because they were not walking as they should. Perhaps Israel questioned God's love because nearly 100 years had passed since they'd returned from Babylonian captivity and they were still struggling agriculturally and economically. However, if they'd known their Scriptures, they would have been able to interpret their poor condition from the divine perspective and realize their suffering was because they'd failed to keep His Word, and not because God did not love or care about them. God revealed His love for them by stating He'd selected their forefather, Jacob, to be the recipient of His covenant blessings, and rejected his brother, Esau, who was cursed (Mal 1:2c-3). In Malachi, the terms "love" and "hate" simply mean God selected one and rejected the other (Jesus used the words in the same way; see Luke 14:26). "We must keep in mind that God's choosing of the line of Jacob did not mean that everyone in Israel would be a redeemed believer; neither did the rejection of Esau's line mean that no Edomite ever came to faith."⁶ Though God loved Israel, He would not tolerate their prideful defiance of Him, for "God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5). In order to restore Israel to a place of humbleness, God used the Babylonians to discipline and take them into captivity. Though He disciplined them according to His covenant promises, it was His faithful love that restored them to fellowship (Deu 4:25-31; 30:1-3). In contrast, Edom had been rejected by God, who also used the Babylonians to defeat them, and though Edom tried to rebuild, God frustrated their efforts and destroyed them completely (Mal 1:4; cf. Jer 27:2-8; 49:7-22). Malachi said, "Your eyes will see this and you will say, 'The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!'" (Mal 1:5). The reference to "your eyes" most likely refers to believing Israelites future from Malachi's day, who would witness God's sovereign destruction of Edom, displaying His ultimate rejection of them, in contrast to the preservation of His people, Israel, whom He loved. In all this we learn something about the loving character of God toward His people, whom He has chosen for a special relationship.

As Christians, we are among God's elect and have been adopted as sons and daughters (Gal 3:26-28), endowed with great blessing (Eph 1:3-6), citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20), a priesthood (Rev 1:6), and an ambassadorship in God's service (2 Cor 5:20). However, the same love that has selected and blessed us will also bring loving discipline when we step out of God's will (Heb 12:5-11); a discipline that is intended to "yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:11b).

⁶ Ibid., 35.

Malachi 1:6-14

“A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name [My name = God’s reputation; cf. Mal 1:11, 14; 2:2, 5]. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ [challenging the accusation] ⁷ “*You* are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ [challenging the accusation] In that you say [by your actions], ‘The table of the LORD is to be despised.’ [table = altar, the place of fellowship; cf. Eze 44:16] ⁸ “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? [forbidden under the Law; see Lev 1:3; Deut 15:21] Why not offer it to your governor? [when you come to sit at his table for fellowship] Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly? [for bringing garbage to dinner]” says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ “But now will you not entreat God’s favor [by humbling yourself through confession and doing His will], that He may be gracious to us? With such an [unacceptable] offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰ “Oh that there were one [priest] among you who would shut the gates [i.e. the doors to the temple courtyard], that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on* My altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD of hosts [because they failed to operate by faith and do as He instructed], “nor will I accept an offering from you. ¹¹ “For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is* pure [representing the best]; for My name *will be* great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts. ¹² “But you are profaning it [through corrupt worship], in that you say, [by your actions] ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.’ [i.e. by bringing unacceptable sacrifices, they declared it was alright to defile the Lord’s table] ¹³ “You also say, ‘My, how tiresome it is!’ [to offer sacrifices] And you disdainfully sniff at it,” says the LORD of hosts, “and you bring what was taken by robbery [stolen food] and *what is* lame or sick; so you bring the [unacceptable] offering! Should I receive that from your hand?” says the LORD. ¹⁴ “But cursed be the swindler [who vows one thing and gives another] who has a [healthy] male in his flock and vows it, but [instead] sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,” says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.”

Summary: God rebukes the priests in Judah who have disdained His name by offering unacceptable sacrifices on the altar (Mal 1:6-14). God admonishes the priests in Judah who failed in their temple duties. The Lord opens with the comment that a good son honors his father and a good servant respects his master but God’s priests disrespect Him and “despise” His name (Mal 1:6). To despise (בָּזָה *bazah*) means to look down on someone or something as worthless. “They did not simply despise the LORD in the way they worshiped; the way they worshiped showed that they were despisers of the LORD.”⁷

⁷ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 60.

The priests ask how they are guilty of despising the Lord, and God answers, by “presenting defiled food upon My altar” (Mal 1:7a). The sacrificial altar is also called “the table of the LORD” (Mal 1:7b), identifying it as the place where people came together, not only to sacrifice, but to eat and fellowship. In ancient Israel, the communal meal was more than a source of nutrition; it communicated a place of fellowship, trust, and respect (see Gen 18:1-8). The priests dishonored the Lord by offering blind, lame, and sick animal sacrifices (Mal 1:8), which were forbidden under the Mosaic Law (Lev 1:3; Deu 15:21). Though the priests were the ones primarily being rebuked, the offerors were also guilty, for they were the ones bringing the unacceptable sacrifices. The quality and attitude of the gift says something about the giver and her/his estimation of the recipient. The poor widow, though she only gave two coins, gave with the right attitude (Mark 12:41-44), and Mary’s gift to Jesus was precious (John 12:1-3).

When the people came to worship, God did not require a great deal of them in the way of offerings—tokens, really, of their herds and their crops, a handful of grain, or an animal or two for the family. But what they brought had to pass two important tests, and in many cases only they and God would know if they passed them. What they brought had to be the *first* and the *best*—the first of their flock, and the best animal they had. Anything less than this was an insult to God. To bring God an inferior gift would say that one did not think much of God, for the quality of the gift indicates the value the giver places on the one receiving the gift. That is true in a human relationship, and it certainly is true in worship.⁸

But God, being gracious, offers them grace if they would humble themselves (Mal 1:9). But if they would not obey Him, it would be better if one of the priests would shut the doors to the temple courtyard rather than offer improper sacrifices (Mal 1:10). God’s name is important, for it represents His divine nature, and He desires that it be honored in all places (Mal 1:11). Yet in Judah, God’s name was despised, and the table of the Lord was defiled (Mal 1:12). The priests even complained that the temple work itself was tiresome, and this led them to “bring what was taken by robbery and *what is* lame or sick” (Mal 1:13). God even rebukes the people, saying, “cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord” (Mal 1:14). This was a disgrace, because God is a great King, and His name should be feared by all.

⁸ Ibid., 51.

Malachi 2:1-9

“And now this commandment is for you, O priests. ² “If you do not listen [שמע *shama* - *to hear, so as to obey*], and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” [i.e. to enrich God’s character/reputation in the sight of others] says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings [i.e. reverse their fortunes]; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart [i.e. not taking God’s commands seriously]. ³ “Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring [likely a reference to bringing the family line to an end; see 1 Sam 24:21; Psa 37:28], and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts [i.e. the fecal matter from the sacrificed animals]; and you will be taken away with it [outside the camp; see Exo 29:14; Lev 4:11-12]. ⁴ “Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you [because He carried out His promise], that My covenant may continue with Levi [see Num 25:10-13],” says the LORD of hosts. ⁵ “My covenant with him was *one of life and peace*, and I gave them [life and peace] to him *as an object of reverence*; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name [i.e. had proper respect for God’s name]. ⁶ “True instruction [תורה *torah* – *direction, instruction, law* – i.e. Scripture] was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips [he benefitted others with God’s truth]; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness [i.e. lived righteously], and he [because of his teaching and lifestyle] turned many back from iniquity [i.e. influenced others to walk with God]. ⁷ “For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction [תורה *torah* – *direction, instruction, law* – i.e. Scripture] from his mouth [priests were to communicate Scripture accurately; see Lev 10:8-11; Deut 31:9-13; 33:8-10]; for he is the messenger [מלאך *malak* – *messenger, angel*] of the LORD of hosts. ⁸ “But as for you [the priests in Judah who were not communicating or living by God’s Word], you have turned aside from the way [i.e. the path of righteousness]; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction [their false teaching led others into sin]; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ “So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people [Malachi’s message exposed the corrupt behavior of the priests to the people], just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction [partiality = favoring some, perhaps the powerful and wealthy, prohibited under the Law; see Lev 19:15; cf. Jam 2:1-9].

Summary:

In this pericope, God rebukes the Levitical priests for not accurately teaching or living by God’s Word, and for leading the people into sin. Malachi chapter two opens with a direct address to the priests in Judah (Mal 2:1). The address was both a warning and a judgment. The warning was, “If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name” says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings” (Mal 2:2a). To listen (שמע *shama*) meant to hear and obey. To give honor to God’s name meant they were to magnify His reputation before others by obeying His Word. If they failed to do this, then He would send a curse upon them and reverse the

blessings He'd given. This process of cursing had already begun, as the Lord states, "indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart" (Mal 2:2b). Apparently, the reversal of some of His blessings was intended to serve as warning discipline for the priests, followed by a promise of further judgment if they continued. If they continued to dishonor His name through their disobedience, He would send a threefold judgement: 1) He would rebuke their offspring (Mal 2:3a), which likely meant their family line would come to an end⁹ (cf. 1 Sam 24:21; Psa 37:28), 2) He would spread refuse on their faces (Mal 2:3b), which meant He would publicly humiliate them, and 3) He would remove their place of ministry (Mal 2:3c), much like the worthless dung was removed from the animal sacrifice and thrown outside the camp (cf. Exo 29:14; Lev 4:11-12). The discipline was intended to humble them so they would take the Lord seriously, do His will, and lead others to do the same. When this happened, they would know it was the Lord who had spoken (Mal 2:4). God's judgment would purge the corrupt elements within the Levitical priesthood in order that it might continue and function properly. Levi, one of the sons of Jacob (Gen 29:34), was not a priest. However, God chose the tribe of Levi to be the priestly tribe in Israel to help with theological training, sacrifices, and worship. Because they held such an important role in Israelite society, a role that influenced the lives of others, they were held to a higher standard. God said of Levi, "My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name" (Mal 2:5). For a priest to revere God meant three things: 1) that he communicated "true instruction" from the Lord (Mal 2:6a), that he walked with God "in peace and uprightness" (Mal 2:6b), 3) that "he turned many back from iniquity" (Mal 2:6c). One of the chief responsibilities of the priests was to teach God's Word to others (Lev 10:8-11; Deut 31:9-13; 33:8-10), "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal 2:7). However, the priests in Malachi's day had failed terribly, as the Lord states, "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi" (Mal 2:8). Not only had the priests stopped following God, their poor teaching and lifestyle led others away as well. So God declared, "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction" (Mal 2:9). Though being "despised and abased before all the people" was a severe punishment, it was a lighter sentence than the death penalty; which was what the Mosaic Law prescribed for priests who offered unfit animal sacrifices (see Num 18:32). In all this, God expected His ministers to know His Word, teach His Word, and live His Word (see Ezra 7:10), so the people of God could hear and see the standard of righteousness that was expected of them. How ministers handle God's Word is a serious matter, for being a teacher can be dangerous business if not done

⁹ Because the priests were disobeying God and leading others into sin through their false teaching, God would cut off their family line and bring it to an end. Here is an example of cursing by association, where one's descendants are impacted by the choices of their parents. Those who want the best for their children will pursue godliness above all else. Parents are to know God's Word, teach it to their children, and model the godly behavior they want to see in their children (Deut 6:4-7; 11:19; Eph 6:4).

properly (Jam 3:1). Christians should know what to expect from their pastors, teachers, worship leaders, counselors, etc. They should also know what God expects from them, for all Christians are called to grow in their faith, to become mature believers, “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

The Old & New Priesthood
Dr. Steven R. Cook

A priest was one who offered prayers, sacrifices, and worship to God on behalf of others. He also offered instruction, by speech and behavior, concerning how to properly approach God in righteousness. In the OT—before the Mosaic Law—few priests are mentioned. Melchizedek functioned as the king/priest of Salem (Gen 14:18-20; cf. Heb 7:1), and Jethro/Ruel (Moses' father-in-law) as the priest of Midian (Ex 2:16-21; 3:1). Job served as the priest over his household, offering sacrifices for the sins of his family (Job 1:5). Most people worshipped and served God as non-priests. Men such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built temporary stone altars and worshipped God directly (Gen 8:20-21; Gen 12:7; 13:18; 26:24-25; 35:1-7). Before the Mosaic Law, it appears that sacrifice and worship were personal, simple, did not require special attire, and were not tied to a specific geographic location or facility.

After Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, God established the Hebrews as a theocratic nation among the Gentile nations of the world. God originally intended the whole nation to be a kingdom of priests, saying, “and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). However, because of the sin of worshipping the golden calf (Ex 32:1-35), God took that privilege from the nation and gave it solely to the tribe of Levi (Num 3:6-10).

Aaron was from the tribe of Levi, and he and his descendants constituted the priestly class in Israel, and other qualified Levites helped them in their priestly duties. The distinction between priests and Levites continued into the NT (John 1:19; Luke 10:31-32). The priests in Israel were not given land (Num 18:20, 23-24), but could live in one of forty-eight cities that were assigned to them (Num 35:7). Their living was derived from the tithe (Num 18:21, 24-28), and they could eat part of the animal sacrifice (Lev 5:13, 7:31-34), along with their family (Lev 10:12-15).

God required that Levitical priests could not have any physical defects (Lev 21:17-23), and restricted the age to twenty-five to fifty (Num 8:24-25). The Levitical priests originally served in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. Special clothing was required both for the priests and the high priest. Throughout the years of their priestly service they were required to:

1. Be holy in their behavior (Ex 19:6).
2. Teach God's Law to others (Lev 10:8-11; Deut 31:9-13; 33:8-10; 2 Chron 17:7-9; Ezra 7:10; Mal 2:7).
3. Offer sacrifices for sin to God (Lev chapters 4, 9, 16).
4. Adjudicate legal matters (Deut 17:8-13; 19:16-17; 2 Chron 19:8-10).
5. Preserve the tabernacle and temple (Num 18:1-7).
6. Perform official duties in the Holy of Holies once a year (Ex 30:6-10; Lev 16).

7. Inspect persons, animals, and fabrics to make sure they were clean (Lev 1:3; Deu 15:21; Lev 13-15).
8. Receive the tithes (Num 18:21, 26; cf. Heb 7:5).
9. Pronounce God's blessing on the nation (Num 6:22-27).

The death of Christ on the cross fulfilled the Mosaic Law and ended the OT animal sacrificial system and the Levitical priesthood (John 1:17; Rom 6:14; 8:3-4; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:1-13; Gal 5:18; Heb 8:13). Jesus is identified as a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Psa 110:4; Heb 7:11-19), and He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone for sin (Mark 10:45; Rom 8:3-4).

Today, there is no specialized priesthood, and the Catholic Church—or any organization—is not justified in creating a priestly cast within the body of Christ. Presently, in the church age, every Christian, at the moment of salvation, becomes a priest to God. Peter writes of Christians, saying, “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5), and “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).¹⁰ This is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who “has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1:6), and “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev 5:10; cf. 20:6). Furthermore, we do not worship at a temple; rather, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17). And we do not bring animal sacrifices, but “offer up spiritual sacrifices” to God (1 Pet 2:5). The basic functions of the Christian priesthood include:

1. The continual giving of the body for service to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2).
2. Confessing our sins directly to God (1 John 1:6-9).
3. Sharing the gospel with others (Rom 15:15-16).
4. Offering praise to God (Heb 13:15).
5. Doing good works and sharing with others (Heb 13:16; cf. Phil 4:18).
6. Giving our lives for the benefit of others (Phil 2:17; cf. Phil 1:21-26; 2:3-4).
7. Walking in love (Eph 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet 1:22).

The Christian becomes a priest at the moment of salvation; however, the practice of the priesthood begins when he/she surrenders their body as a “living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom 12:1). Unlike the OT animal sacrifices which surrendered their lives once, the Christian life is a moment by

¹⁰ Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum argues that the references in 1 Peter 2:5-9 refers narrowly to Jewish Christians, and there is merit to his argument. He also makes clear that all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, are priests to God, and references Revelation 1:6; 5:10, and 20:6 as his prooftexts. For further investigation, read *Israelology*, pages 720-722.

moment, continual surrender to God. This spiritual service is performed by the believer “to our God” (Rev 5:10), for the benefit of others (Gal 6:10; Phil 2:3-4; Heb 13:16).

Malachi 2:10-16

“Do we [Israel] not all have one father? [cf. [Ex 4:22](#); [Isa 63:16](#)] Has not one God created us? [see [Isa 43:15](#)] Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother [rather than in love; see [Lev 19:18](#)] so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? [i.e. the Mosaic Covenant; [Ex 24:1-18](#)] ¹¹ “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary [[שִׁקְיָהּ qodesh](#) – *holy, sacred*; “the holy things” NET; perhaps referring to marriage itself] of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god [i.e. married a foreign woman who kept her pagan faith; which was forbidden – [Deut 7:1-4](#); cf. [Ezra 9:1-2](#); [2 Cor 6:14-16](#)]. ¹² “As for the man who does this [i.e. marries a woman who is committed to idolatry], may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone* who awakes and answers [i.e. “whoever he may be” NIV], or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts [i.e. continues to approach God through sacrifices, as though he’s done nothing wrong]. ¹³ “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with favor* from your hand [i.e. does not answer their prayers, cf. [1 Pet 3:7](#)]. ¹⁴ “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ [i.e. why does God not answer?] Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth [i.e. his believing wife], against whom you have dealt treacherously [by divorcing her and marrying an unbelieving wife], though she is your companion and your wife by covenant [in the sight of God]. ¹⁵ “But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the Spirit [i.e. the man led by the Spirit has not abandoned his wife]. And what did *that* one *do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? [hoping a godly marriage would produce godly children] Take heed then to your spirit [i.e. to your spiritual life], and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth [so as to divorce her]. ¹⁶ “For I hate divorce,” [i.e. God rejects their actions] says the LORD, the God of Israel [their supreme Law-Giver and Judge], “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” [covering garment = metaphor for marriage; see [Ruth 3:9](#); [Ezek 16:8](#)] says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” [i.e. to your spiritual life and don’t be faithless to your spouse]

Summary:

In this pericope, Malachi rebukes the men who divorced their wives and married unbelievers who were still committed to their paganism. In the opening verse, Malachi points out that Israel was a special nation, created by God ([Isa 43:15](#)), who regards Himself as their Father, and the nation as His son ([Ex 4:22](#); [Isa 63:16](#)). As such, the Israelites were not behaving as loving siblings, but were treating each other treacherously ([Mal 2:10](#)). The treacherous behavior addressed was that many of the Israelite men had “married the daughter of a foreign god” ([Mal 2:11](#)). These men had divorced their believing wives and married foreign women who kept their pagan faith; which was forbidden ([Deut 7:1-4](#)). Apparently, Ezra and Nehemiah were dealing with the same issue (see [Ezra 9:1-4](#); [Neh 13:23-31](#)). An Israelite believer could marry a foreigner, like Ruth,

if she joined the faith. But if she held fast to her pagan gods, like Jezebel, then it was forbidden. In the NT, Christians are warned against marrying unbelievers because it will cause problems and lead them away from the Lord (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-18). The Israelite man guilty of marrying a woman who was committed to idolatry was to be “cut off from the tents of Jacob” (Mal 2:12a), even though he continued to approach God through sacrifices, acting as if he’d done nothing wrong (Mal 2:12b). Restoring the relationship with his believing wife was more important than offering sacrifices to the Lord (cf. Matt 5:23-24). Another thing these men were doing included covering “the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand” (Mal 2:13). They wanted their sin and God’s blessings too; but God refused to answer their prayers because they failed to treat their believing wives honorably. This principle is true in the NT, as Christian men are told to live with their wives in an understanding way, to “show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7). The sin of these Israelite men had rendered them spiritually dull, and they were wondering, “for what reason” the Lord was not answering their prayers (Mal 2:14a). Malachi plainly explained, “Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal 2:14). God intended their marriage to be based on loyal-love, with each seeking God’s best in their partner; however, these men behaved treacherously by divorcing their wives, presumably to satisfy their sexual desires with pagan women. Marriage is a divine institution (Gen 2:21-24), in which God is personal witness to the covenant bond. The man who had even a remnant of the Spirit working in his life did not abandon his wife (Mal 2:15a). Furthermore, he would likely be one who produced godly offspring, as his children would see his commitment and perhaps follow in his footsteps (Mal 2:15b). Men devoid of divine viewpoint will naturally care little about spiritual matters in their own lives or the lives of their children. If permitted to spread, the practice of divorcing godly wives and marrying pagans would undermine the spiritual fabric of Israel’s society and lead to national instability. So, Malachi says to these men, “Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth” (Mal 2:15c). The spiritual husband would be committed to God and faithful to his wife, ministering to her needs as best he can. The Lord then states, very emphatically, “I hate divorce” (Mal 2:16a).¹¹ God created the institution of marriage (Gen 2:21-24), which is intended to unite, in faithfulness, a man and a woman together for life. The union is between God and the couple He joins together. And, because God Himself is a covenant keeping God who is faithful to His promises, He expects those who walk with Him to keep their promises too. Unfortunately, many in Malachi’s day were divorcing their wives

¹¹ The Hebrew text could also read: “If he hates and divorces his wife” (CSB) or “The man who hates and divorces his wife” (NIV). If correct, the subject of “hate” is the husband, not the Lord; and the object of the husband’s hate is his wife. Whether God or the husband is the subject in the passage, divorce is wrong. However, because of sin, divorce was permitted (Deut 24:1-4; Matt 19:7-8), and the marriage could be terminated because of adultery (Matt 19:9), or desertion of an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12-16). Though divorce is an option, it is not required, and reconciliation, if possible, is always preferred.

for sinful reasons; and, rather than wearing a garment of love, with which to cover and protect his wife, he wore a garment of “wrong” that injured himself, his wife, and his children. So, God says to this man, for a second time, “take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (Mal 2:16c). The spiritual man who walks with God will honor his vows to his wife and remain faithful to her.

Marriage: A Divine Institution

Dr. Steven R. Cook

According to Scripture, God created four foundational institutions that are for individual blessing and national stability. The four divine institutions are: **Responsible Dominion**—the sphere of life God has placed under our care (Gen 1:26-30; 2:16-17), **Marriage**—the covenantal union of a man and a woman to serve and enjoy God (Gen 2:18-24; cf. Matt 19:4-6), **Family**—the smallest social unit intended to train succeeding generations for godliness and authority orientation (Gen 4:1-2; Deut 6:4-7; Eph 6:1-4), **Human Government**—the delegated authority to government to promote freedom, order, and to protect citizens from evil (Gen 9:5-7; 10:32; 11:1-9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom 13:1-7). Each of these institutions build on each other, for there will not be national stability if the families are not morally strong; the families will not be morally strong if the marriage is not godly; and, the marriage will not be godly if individuals are not making good choices to know and walk in God’s will.

Marriage, being a divine institution, it is not open to redefinition or modification by people, and there are penalties—both individual and national—for those who would tinker with them. The first married couple set the standard for marriage. As man and woman, Adam and Eve were created in God’s image to live under His provision and authority, to walk in fellowship with Him, and to fulfill the specific purpose of ruling over His creation (Gen 1:26-28). In this regard they were to complement each other. All three members of the Trinity were involved in the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen 1:26-28). Scripture reveals, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). Adam and Eve were created for relationships; first with God, then with each other, then the animals and world around them. They were to fulfill the divine mandate to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). They possessed a clear sense of purpose under the authority of God.

Genesis chapter one provides a snapshot of the creation of the first couple; however, in Genesis chapter two, we learn there was a short lapse of time between the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:15-24). Originally, Adam was created sinless, with the unhindered capacity to walk with God and serve Him. Though he was sinless, Adam was not complete. God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [Heb. עֵזֶר ezer] suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). Before God created the first woman, He took time to educate Adam about his relational incompleteness. God brought a multitude of animals before Adam (most likely in pairs of male and female), and after observing and naming them (Gen 2:19), Adam realized “there was not found a helper [Heb. עֵזֶר ezer] suitable for him” (Gen 2:20). God corrected what Adam could not. The Lord caused Adam to fall asleep and “took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place” (Gen 2:21). God

then “fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (Gen 2:22). This was a divinely arranged marriage. It is noteworthy that the “woman was taken not from Adam’s head to dominate him, nor from his feet to be trodden down, but from under his arm to be protected, and from near his heart to be loved.”¹²

Sin changed humanity and the world in which we live. Satan (a fallen angel) attacked the first marriage and tempted the man and woman to disobey God (Gen 3:1-7). Adam and Eve listened to Satan and rejected God’s will (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-8), and sin was introduced into the human race and the whole world is now under a curse (Gen 3:8-19; Rom 5:12-19; 8:20-22). Eve was deceived by Satan, but Adam sinned with his eyes open (1 Tim 2:14). The institution of marriage continued after the historic fall of Adam and Eve and took on various ceremonies based on ever changing social customs. The Bible directs believers to marry believers (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-15), but does not prescribe a specific ceremony to follow, or vows to take, but leaves these matters for people to decide for themselves. Marriage is divinely illustrative of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel (Isa 54:5), and Christ’s relationship with the church (2 Cor 11:2). Marriage is to be holy, because God is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). Marriage is to be built on love, because God is love (1 John 4:16-21).

Marriage is a covenant relationship (Prov 2:16-17; Ezek 16:8; Mal 2:14-15; Matt 19:6). In Scripture, the word covenant (Heb. בְּרִית *berith*, Grk. διαθήκη *diateke*) is used of a treaty, alliance, or contract. The strength of a covenant depends on the person, or persons, who enter into it. Some covenants are vertical between God and individuals or groups, and some are horizontal between people. Some of God’s covenants are unilateral, in which God acts alone and unconditionally promises to provide and bless another. Some of God’s covenants are bilateral, in which blessing or cursing is conditioned on faithful obedience to stated laws. Covenants made by people are generally bilateral, depending on the faithfulness of each person to keep their promise. Though we, as individuals, may unilaterally promise to be faithful to our spouses (which is good), no matter what, we also realize that our promises are no stronger than our ability or integrity to hold on to them. Because none of us are morally perfect, nor hold infinite power to be good and do good, but live in a fallen world and possess sinful natures that draw us away from what is right, we realize that faithfulness to vows is not always a reality. Even some of the godliest men and women have failed to keep their word. Because of sin, the Bible permits a way out of the marital relationship in cases of adultery (Matt 5:32; 19:8-9), or abandonment (1 Cor 7:12-15). Though available, these options are not always preferable (1 Cor 7:10-11).

Role Responsibilities in Marriage

Ephesians 5:22-33 addresses Christian couples only and portrays the marriage as tri-personal, involving the husband, wife, and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian husband

¹² William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 35.

and wife are spiritually equal in God's sight (Gal 3:28; 1 Pet 3:7); however, spiritual equality should not be confused with role distinctions. The husband is to be the leader of the home, as Christ is the head of the church, and the wife is to submit to her husband, as the church submits to Christ. Both the husband and wife fulfill God's expectations when they learn to function together as a unit, each executing their godly roles. The Christian man who agrees to marry automatically comes under the authority of God who directs him to love his wife as Christ loves the church. The wife who agrees to marry also comes under the authority of God who calls her to submit to her husband.

God designed the husband to be the loving leader to guide the relationship into His will, and the wife is to walk in harmony with him (Gen 2:18; 21-23; cf. Eph 5:25-33). The husband is to love (*ἀγαπάω* agapao) his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25), and he does this in submission to Christ who is his authority (1 Cor 11:3). The apostle Paul describes Christian love, saying, "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:4-8a).

The Christian husband is called to live with his wife in an understanding way and to honor her as a fellow heir of the grace of God (1 Pet 3:7). He is to make his wife feel protected and safe, for there can be no love where fear is present (1 John 4:18). Biblical love is sacrificial (Eph 5:25; cf. Matt 20:28; John 13:34; 15:13; Rom 5:8; 14:15; 15:3), is greater than feelings (Col 3:19), and cares more about others than self (Matt 5:43-45; Phil 2:3-4). Biblical love is gracious, unselfish, and given freely from the bounty of one's own resources, with an open hand, always for the benefit and joy of others, expecting nothing in return. It is, in fact, God's love, born in the heart of the believer who walks with God and desires His closeness.

The husband's love is measured against the love of Jesus Christ. So how does Christ love? The greatest act of Christ's love is seen in the sacrifice of His life by which He saves and sanctifies the church (Eph 5:23, 25). Christ is also full of grace and truth (John 1:14-17), He lifts the burdens of those who come to Him (Matt 11:28-30; Mark 10:42-45), He builds up and protects (Matt 16:18), He prayerfully intercedes (Rom 8:34), He comforts (2 Thess 2:16-17), and He is faithful (2 Tim 2:13). The Christian man who fully understands the love of Christ for him will have both a motivation and model by which to love his wife.

The wife was created to "help" her husband (Gen 2:20). The word helper (Heb. עֵזֶר *ezer*) is an exalted term that is sometimes employed of God who helps the needy (Gen 49:25; Ex 18:4; 1 Sam 7:12; Isa 41:10; Psa 10:14; 33:20). Just as God helps His people to do His will, so the wife is called to help her husband serve the Lord and bring Him glory. She helps her husband by encouraging him to seek the Lord and live godly. The wife is also

called to love her husband (Tit 2:4), and to respect him (Eph 5:33), both in private and in public. To respect is to revere, value highly, think much of, esteem. She respects him because of the Lord, not because he is perfect or always deserves it. In this manner, respect is a display of grace, not merit. Being respectful is thoughtful and intentional as she consults him as the leader of the family, discusses matters with him (work, finances, friends, etc.) and supports his decisions. Though he fails, she does not criticize him in front of others, nor talk badly about him when he's not around. Rather, she is polite and notes his good qualities and accomplishments. Of course, the man who grows spiritually, serves as the spiritual leader to his family, makes more good choices than bad, and faithfully loves his wife makes it easier for her to respect him.

Lastly, just as the husband has an ideal model of love and service in Christ, the wife has an ideal model in the woman of excellence described in Proverbs 31. The phrase *an excellent wife* (Pro 31:10; Heb. אִשָּׁת־חַיִל *esheth chayil*) was first used of Ruth, who was described as *a woman of excellence* (Ruth 3:11, NASB) or *a woman of noble character* (CSB). Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David, who married Bathsheba, who is perhaps the one who shared her wisdom with her son, King Solomon (Pro 31:1). If this is correct, then it's possible Bathsheba saw in Ruth a template for the woman of noble character. A study of the book of Ruth reveals she was committed to God and His people (Ruth 1:16-17; 2:11), possessed a strong work ethic (Ruth 2:7, 17), listened to good advice (Ruth 2:8-9; 3:1-6), showed respect to others (Ruth 2:10), cared for the needy (Ruth 2:17-18), sought to marry a noble man (Ruth 3:7-10; 4:13), and was praised for her excellence and love for others (Ruth 3:11; 4:15).

According to Proverbs 31:10-31, the excellent wife is precious to her husband (Pro 31:10), and he trusts her (Pro 31:11). It is said, "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Pro 31:12). She delights to work with her hands, knowing she's providing for the good of her family (Pro 31:13, 15, 17-19, 27). She's a smart shopper (Pro 31:14), and savvy business woman (Pro 31:16, 24), who is recognized for her work (Pro 31:31). She uses her time well (Pro 31:15, 27), is energetic and strong (Pro 31:17), cares for the poor and needy (Pro 31:20), provides for those in her household (Pro 31:21, 27), and does not neglect her own needs or appearance (Pro 31:22). As she is respected in the home, her husband is respected in the community (Pro 31:23), and both he and her children give praise for her dignity (Pro 31:28). She has an optimistic outlook on life, as "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future" (Pro 31:25). She is also noted for her wisdom, and "the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (Pro 31:26). She is the ideal wife, for though many women have done nobly, she excels them all (Pro 31:29). What makes this woman so excellent? What drives her to possess all the virtues of a godly woman, for which her husband praises her? Solomon tells us. It's not her personal *charm*, which is deceitful; nor her physical *beauty*, which is fleeting (Pro 31:30a). Rather, it's because she is "a woman who fears the LORD" (Pro 31:30b). This one "shall be praised" by all who know and appreciate her godliness. What is prioritized is the inner qualities of

godliness and virtue that make for an enjoyable, stable, and lasting marriage. Other qualities and features of godly women are as follows:

I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. (1 Tim 2:9-12)

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Tit 2:4-6)

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (1 Pet 3:1-6)

Malachi 2:17—3:6

You [rebellious Israelite] have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied *Him*?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” [some argued God approved of evil] or, “Where is the God of justice?” [others argued God was absent to dispense justice] ¹ “Behold, I am going to send My messenger [מַלְאָכִי *malachi* – a reference to John the Baptist; Matt 11:10, 14; 17:11-12], and he [John the Baptist] will clear the way before Me [i.e. prepare the hearts of His people for Jesus’ coming, cf. Isa 40:3-5; John 1:23]. And the Lord, whom you seek [for justice], will suddenly come to His temple; and [even] the messenger of the covenant [perhaps the New Covenant], in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. ² “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap [who will purify and cleanse the nation]. ³ “He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver [to burn away the impure dross], and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver [in order to restore them to proper service], so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness [and not as they had been doing; cf. Mal 2:8]. ⁴ “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. ⁵ “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely [i.e. perjurers who give a false testimony], and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages [withholding compensation], the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” [cf. Isa 1:23; Jer 7:5-8; Ezek 22:7-13; Zec 7:10] says the LORD of hosts. ⁶ “For I, the LORD, do not change [in essence]; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed [God is faithful to His covenant promises; therefore, the nation is not destroyed].

Summary:

The primary point of this pericope is that God will judge His people in order to purify them for future service. The pericope opens with anthropomorphic language in which God tells His people they had wearied Him with their words. In incredulity, they asked, “How have we wearied Him?” What they were saying was, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?” (Mal 2:17). Apparently, some assumed God was approving of evil, while others thought He simply did not care about justice. Of course, God cares about justice. He is righteous in character and just in all His ways. God does show grace to the wicked (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17), that they might have time to respond to Him in faith and be saved; for God “is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9); and the righteous are, at times, permitted to suffer (Job 1:1-21; 2:9-10; 2 Tim 3:12). But God will judge the wicked; if not in this life, then the next (Rev 20:11-15). The Lord responded to their comments by pointing them to the future; specifically, the time when He would send His messenger, saying, “Behold, I am going to send My messenger,

and he will clear the way before Me” (Mal 3:1a). We know from the NT that this messenger is John the Baptist (Matt 11:10, 14; 17:11-12), who prepared the way for Messiah (cf. Isa 40:3-5). Then the Lord says, “And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming” (Mal 3:1b). This refers to Jesus, the Messiah. “From the historical perspective, since this is an oracle about John the Baptist preparing people for Jesus the Messiah, then the covenant must be the new covenant that Christ inaugurated in the upper room and sealed with his blood at the cross.”¹³ Jesus’ first coming is only a partial fulfillment of this prophecy, which will be completed at His second coming, when He will judge the world and establish His kingdom on earth. Malachi then states, “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Mal 3:2). Jesus will come after the time of the Tribulation, and will judge His people in order to remove their impurities, (Mal 3:2b). God “will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver” (Mal 3:3a). The Levites in Malachi’s day were not leading worship as they should, and were under God’s judgment. In the future, when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth, the Levites will again serve in the temple. However, at that time, they will be refined and cleansed by the Lord, “so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness” (Mal 3:3b). That future generation of priests will offer as the Lord prescribes, saying, “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years” (Mal 3:4). Furthermore, in that day, God will judge all Israel, not just the Levites, and He will judge them for their many sins, saying, “Then I will draw near to 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 those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me” (Mal 3:5). God will judge sorcerers who seek to know the future by magical means, adulterers who are unfaithful in marriage, and those who corrupt justice by giving false testimony (Mal 3:5a). He will also judge those who oppress, either actively or passively, the most vulnerable in society, which include the common laborer, the widow and orphan, and the transient traveler passing through the land (Mal 3:5b). God’s people could know His promises were true, for they rested on His unchangeable nature, as He tells them, “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). When God says He “does not change” (Mal 3:6a), He is speaking of His nature, not the course of action He may take with His people. We must remember that Israel was locked into a bilateral covenant—the Mosaic covenant—which made blessing or cursing dependent of their obedience or disobedience (see Deut 28:1-68). The Mosaic covenant was itself tied to a unilateral covenant—the Abrahamic covenant—which guaranteed Israel’s future preservation (Gen 12:1-3). God, who does not change, was faithful to purify His people in the furnace of affliction, while keeping His hand on the thermostat, so that they were not totally destroyed.

¹³ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 135.

The Attributes of God

Dr. Steven R. Cook

Throughout Scripture, we learn that God has specific characteristics that inform us as to His being. God's attributes refer to His personal qualities or traits that describe who He is and explain why He thinks and acts in certain ways. What we know of God's attributes comes to us by divine revelation, not by human reason or speculation. More so, what is revealed about God's attributes can be said to belong to the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The various perfections of God are not component parts of God. Each describes His total being. Love, for example, is not a part of God's nature; God in His total being is love. Although God may display one quality or another at a given time, no quality is independent of or preeminent over any of the others. Whenever God displays His wrath, He is still love. When He shows His love, He does not abandon His holiness. God is more than the sum total of His perfections. When we have listed all the attributes we can glean from revelation, we have not fully described God. This stems from His incomprehensibility. Even if we could say we had a complete list of all God's perfections, we could not fathom their meaning, for finite man cannot comprehend the infinite God.¹⁴

When studying the attributes of God, the student of Scripture should never seek to understand them separately from God, as though an attribute of God may exist apart from Him. More so, the attributes of God are as infinite as God Himself, and to try to understand them fully is not within the scope of our ability. A detailed understanding of God's attributes prevents the believer from developing an incomplete, or faulty view of God, in which he/she sees Him only in part. For example, a solitary view of God as righteous can lead a Christian to legalistic behavior, whereas a singular understanding of God as loving or gracious can lead to licentiousness. A thorough biblical understanding of God will prove healthy for the Christian who seeks to reflect His character. The biblical revelation of God has practical application for the growing Christian, for as the believer advances in spiritual maturity, he/she will take on the characteristics of God, though only a few of those characteristics may be visible to others at any given moment, depending on the situation. The major attributes of God as revealed in Scripture are as follows:

1. **Living** – “My soul thirsts for God, for **the living God**” (Psa 42:2a). “My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to **the living God**” (Psa 84:2). “But the LORD is the true God; He is **the living God** and the everlasting King” (Jer 10:10a). “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of **the living God.**’” (Matt 16:16).

¹⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 39–40.

2. **Sovereign** – “But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases**” (Psa 115:3). “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but **He does according to His will** in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35; cf. Acts 17:24-28).
3. **Immutable** – “Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But **You are the same**, and Your years will not come to an end.” (Psa 102:26-27). “For **I, the LORD, do not change**; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” (Mal 3:6).
4. **Eternal** – “**The eternal God** is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut 33:27). “Now to **the King eternal**, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Tim 1:17).
5. **All-knowing** – “O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, **You know it all**” (Psa 139:1-4). “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for **your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things**. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:31-33)
6. **All-present** – “**Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?** If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.” (Psa 139:7-10). ““Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?” declares the LORD. ‘**Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?**’ declares the LORD.” (Jer 23:24)
7. **All-powerful** – “Then Job answered the LORD and said, ‘**I know that You can do all things**, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted’” (Job 42:2). “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth **does not become weary or tired**. His understanding is inscrutable.” (Isa 40:28).
8. **Righteous** – “For **the LORD is righteous**, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face” (Psa 11:7). “**Righteous are You, O LORD**, and upright are Your judgments” (Psa 119:137).
9. **Just** – “The LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, and **He will judge the world in righteousness**; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity” (Psa 9:7-8). “**The judgments of the LORD are true**; they are righteous altogether. (Psa 19:9b).

10. **Holy** – “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, **for I am holy**” (Lev 11:44a). “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for **holy is the LORD our God**” (Psa 99:9).
11. **Truthful** – “Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and **Your words are truth**, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant” (2 Sam 7:28). “Sanctify them in the truth; **Your word is truth**” (Joh 17:17).
12. **Loving** – “The LORD appeared to him [Israel] from afar, *saying*, ‘**I have loved you with an everlasting love**; therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness’” (Jer 31:3). “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, **for God is love.**” (1 John 4:7-8)
13. **Faithful** - Know therefore that the LORD your God, **He is God, the faithful God**, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut 7:9). “This I recall to my mind; therefore, I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. *They* are new every morning; **great is Your faithfulness**” (Lam 3:21-23).
14. **Merciful** – “You, O Lord, are **a God merciful** and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth” (Psa 86:15). “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to **His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5).
15. **Gracious** – “He has made His wonders to be remembered; **the LORD is gracious** and compassionate” (Psa 111:4). “**Gracious is the LORD**, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate.” (Psa 116:5).

Malachi 3:7-12

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept *them* [i.e. became disobedient to the covenant]. Return to Me [by obeying God’s laws], and I will return to you [with blessing],” says the LORD of hosts. “But you say, ‘How shall we return?’”⁸ “Will a man rob God? [steal/withhold from God what is rightfully His] Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings [tithes and offerings = a tenth of the produce of the land and herds given to support the priests; see Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:8, 11, 19, 21-24].⁹ “You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation *of you!*”¹⁰ “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse [בֵּית הָאוֹצָר - *bet ha otsar* – store, treasury, storehouse – a room used to hold frankincense, utensils, grain, wine, and oil for the priests; see Neh 13:5], so that there may be food in My house [for the priests to eat], and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven [by sending rain; see Deut 28:12] and pour out [רִיק *riq* - lit. *empty out*] for you a blessing until it overflows.”¹¹ “Then [after their obedience] I will rebuke the devourer for you [devourer = locusts], so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground [i.e. ruin the harvest]; nor will your vine in the field cast *its grapes*,” says the LORD of hosts.¹² “All the nations will call you blessed [i.e. recognize God’s blessing upon them], for you shall be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts.

Summary:

The central idea of the text is that God calls His people, Israel, to obedience concerning the giving of tithes and offerings, and promises blessing for compliance. Israel had, like many times throughout their history, turned aside from following God and not obeying His commands (Mal 3:7a). However, if they would return to Him in obedience, He would return to them with blessing (Mal 3:7b). His people asked, “How shall we return?” (Mal 3:7c). God then charges them with thievery, saying, “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!” (Mal 3:8a). To which His people replied, “How have we robbed You?” (Mal 3:8b). God said their theft came from withholding their “tithes and offerings” (Mal 3:8c). The tithes and offerings referred to the tenth of the produce of the land and herds that were given by the nation to support the priests in their service at the temple (Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:8, 11, 19, 21-24).

The so-called tithe (“a tenth”) added up to far more than a simple 10% annually, because there was a second tithe annually, and a third tithe in the third and fifth years...In the Old Testament economy all the giving covered the sanctuary offerings for God, the taxes for the nation, and charitable gifts all rolled together.¹⁵

¹⁵ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 156.

Because of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant, God declared, "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!" (Mal 3:9). However, God offered to turn their situation around if they would return to Him and "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house to eat" (Mal 3:10a). The storehouse (בֵּית הַאֹצֵר - *bet ha otsar*) referred a large room where "they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests" (Neh 13:5). God calls on His people to test Him concerning His promises (Mal 3:10b), and if they will be obedient concerning the tithes and offerings, He declares, He will "open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows." (Mal 3:10b). Here God promises to send rain for their crops to grow, and in this way, He will honor His covenant promises (Deut 28:12). In addition, God states, "I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," (Mal 3:11). The devourer likely referred to locusts that were eating their crops. Not only would Israel enjoy the material blessings of God, but the surrounding nations would see it, and "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land" (Mal 3:12). Malachi 3:8-10 has nothing to do with the Church. To be clear, Israel and the Church are both God's people, but Israel was under "the Law" of Moses (John 1:17), whereas the Church is under the "Law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:31; Gal 6:2). Israel was required to tithe from the produce of their land (Deut 14:22-23; 28-29; Num 18:21), but there is no tithe required from Christians, only a joyful attitude when giving, "for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

The Biblical Teaching on Tithes
Dr. Steven R. Cook

The word *tithe* means “to give a tenth.” Prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law (ca. 1445 B.C.), we see an example of Abraham giving Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of war which he had accumulated after he had defeated Chedorlaomer at the Valley of Shaveh (Gen 14:17-20). Later, Jacob made a vow to give God a tenth of his possessions if God would be faithful to protect him on a journey (Gen 28:20-22). In the accounts of Abraham and Jacob, there was no mandate from heaven for them to give a tenth, and when they did give a tenth, it appears to be a one-time act, never repeated as far as Scripture is concerned. It was not until several centuries later that tithing became mandatory for the nation of Israel when they entered into the Mosaic Covenant and came under the Mosaic Law.

When God established the nation of Israel as a theocracy under the leadership of Moses and Aaron (ca.1445 B.C.), He gave them 613 commandments known as the Mosaic Law. This law-code was designed to regulate the values and behavior of the citizens of the nation, morally, religiously, socially, economically, etc. Within the Mosaic Law, God required Israel to pay several tithes, which was tantamount to a form of taxation.

The so-called tithe (“a tenth”) added up to far more than a simple 10% annually, because there was a second tithe annually, and a third tithe in the third and fifth years...In the Old Testament economy all the giving covered the sanctuary offerings for God, the taxes for the nation, and charitable gifts all rolled together.¹⁶

The tithe consisted of produce and livestock (Lev 27:30-32), and was given to the Levites for their support for ministry (Num 18:21-24). The Levites, in turn, gave a tithe of the tithe to the Priests for their service (Num 18:25-28). Additionally, the worshipper could eat a portion of the sacrifice with his family and the Levites (Deut 12:17-19; 14:22-27). Lastly, a tithe was taken every third year to help the poor, the alien, the orphans and the widows. This tithe was comparable to a social welfare system for the most unfortunate in society.

At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit *it* in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do. (Deut 14:28-29)

The tithe was to be gathered into a “storehouse” (בֵּית הָאוֹצָר - *bet ha otsar*; Mal 3:10), which referred to a large room where “they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the

¹⁶ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 156.

gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests” (Neh 13:5). Withholding the tithe was a form of robbery to God, the Levites, and the less fortunate in society who depended on it for daily living (Mal 3:6-11).

Sadly, some pastors have mishandled Malachi 3:8-10 and applied it to the Church, browbeating Christians to make them feel guilty for not giving money to the Church. Some tyrants have even required church members to show their annual tax returns, or publicly posted their annual contributions in order to strong-arm Christians to give. This is more an act of despotic control over one’s flock than loving leadership. Pastors who use Malachi 3:8-10 against Christians display both an ignorance of God’s Word and a spiritual immaturity in leadership. The fact is, Malachi 3:8-10 has nothing to do with the Church.

To be clear, Israel and the Church are both God’s people, but Israel was under “the Law” of Moses (John 1:17), whereas the Church is under the “Law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:11; Gal 6:2). Israel had a priesthood that was specific to the tribe of Levi (Num 3:6-7), whereas all Christians are priests to God (Rev 1:6). Israel worshipped first at the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Ex 40:18-38; 2 Chron 8:14-16), but for Christians, their body is the temple of the Lord and they gather locally where they want (1 Cor 6:19-20; cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15). Israel offered animal sacrifices to God (Lev 4:1-35), but Christians offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5; cf. Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15). Israel was required to tithe from the produce of their land (Deut 14:22-23; 28-29; Num 18:21), but there is no tithe required from Christians, only a joyful attitude when giving, “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).

To Christians, the apostle Paul mentions systematic giving (1 Cor 16:1-2), but nowhere specifies an amount. Giving 10% of one’s income is fine, so long as it is understood that it’s a voluntary action and not required by the Lord. One could easily set aside a different amount to be given on a regular basis. Certainly, the financial support of the Pastor is in line with Scripture (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18), although the apostle Paul supported himself in his own ministry as an example to others of sacrificial living (Acts 20:32-35). Giving systematically and giving joyfully is consistent with the teaching of the New Testament (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 9:7).

Lastly, we should realize all we have is on loan from God, for “the earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it” (Psa 24:1). The Lord declares, “every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psa 50:10), and ““The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine’, declares the LORD of hosts” (Hag 2:8). When we give to the Lord, it’s a test of our love and loyalty to Him; for what we give is already His, and giving back to Him means we trust and support His work in the world. David captures this well when he says, “who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You” (1 Ch 29:14).

Malachi 3:13-18

Your words have been arrogant against Me,” [or “You have criticized me sharply” NET]) says the LORD. “Yet you say [contesting the charge], ‘What have we spoken against You?’”¹⁴ “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?’”¹⁵ “So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.”¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD [i.e. the faithful remnant] spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard *it* [i.e. heard their theological discussion], and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name.¹⁷ “They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I prepare *My* own possession [שְׂגֻלָּה *segullah* – special property of the Lord; cf. [Ex 19:5](#); [Deut 7:6](#); [26:18](#)], and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”¹⁸ So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Summary:

The central idea of the text is that many in Judah did not think it was worth serving the Lord and that the wicked were the ones who prospered (Mal 3:13-15); however, a humble remnant of believers responded positively to the Lord, and He recognized them and promised to make them His special possession and bless them (Mal 3:16-18). The pericope opens with a statement from the Lord, who says, “Your words have been arrogant against Me” (Mal 3:13a). The Lord was speaking to Israelites who were dominated by negative volition. The statement might imply they were speaking negatively among themselves rather than directly to God. They challenge His charge with the question, “What have we spoken against You?” (Mal 3:13b). The Lord revealed their attitude of thinking it was not worth their efforts to serve Him, claiming the wicked prospered more than the righteous. These said, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” (Mal 3:14). Their words reveal selfish expectations in that they saw their relationship with God mainly from the perspective of the “profit” they could obtain for their service. “The claim is expressed by means of a rhetorical question to indicate that there was no profit in it, no reward or benefit, no pay, no return on their investment. They are like some modern folk who give to God only because they expect to get double or triple their money back, a special reward.”¹⁷ These Israelites thought that going through the religious motions was enough to win them a big payoff from the Lord. When they did not get it, they changed their minds about God and how they should live before Him. They saw the wicked doing as they pleased and getting rich, and they concluded, “So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape” (Mal 3:15). These came to this false conclusion because they saw no

¹⁷ Allen P. Ross, *Malachi Then and Now: An Expository Commentary Based on Detailed Exegetical Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 174–175.

immediate reward for obedience, nor punishment for wrongdoing. However, there were righteous believers in Judah who were described as “those who feared the LORD” and who gathered together and “spoke to one another” (Mal 3:16a). It is a healthy activity for believers to gather together to encourage one another (Heb 10:23-25). Unlike their counterparts, these believers loved the Lord and revered His name, and they did not speak arrogantly, nor in a self-seeking manner. The text reveals, “and the LORD gave attention and heard it” (Mal 3:16b). That is, God heard their theological discussion and approved. As a result, “a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name” (Mal 3:16c). The book of remembrance (סֵפֶר זִכְרוֹן - *sefer zikkaron*) is a permanent record in heaven of their reverent response to God. Of course, the omniscient God does not need a book to remember His people and their faithfulness to Him; rather, the language is anthropomorphic and used to communicate the Lord’s intention to acknowledge and remember the faithfulness of those who revere Him and honor His name. “They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him” (Mal 3:17b). The word “possession” translates the Hebrew סְגֻלָּה *segullah*, which means “special property” (cf. Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; 26:18). These would be spared the judgment that He has planned for the wicked. Thomas Constable writes:

Almighty Yahweh announced that He would honor those who feared Him as His own on the day He prepared His own possessions. This probably refers to the day of the Lord (cf. v. 2; 4:1, 3) when He will resurrect Old Testament saints and judge them. This will be when Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign on the earth. The faithful will receive a reward in His kingdom for their submission. He also promised to spare them as a man spares his own son. When Jesus Christ judges Old Testament saints, He will separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). Here God described the sheep as His sons. He will spare them the humiliation and punishment that will be the lot of those who did not honor Him (vv. 14–15).¹⁸

In this way, God would “distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (Mal 3:18). God’s rewards and judgments should not be seen merely within the short timeframe of our lives, but always in light of the future and eternal state, toward which we are moving. This is not to say that God does not bless His people in this life; certainly, He does bless some materially. However, our motivation to serve the Lord should not be based on what we can obtain in this life, which things are destined to perish, but rather, for imperishable rewards that are eternal (1 Cor 3:5-15).

¹⁸ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mal 3:17.

Malachi 4:1-6

“For behold, the day is coming [i.e. the day of God’s future judgment], burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” [the Day of the Lord is mentioned several times in Scripture as the time when God will pour out His wrath upon the earth; cf. [Isa 13:9](#); [Joel 2:30-31](#); [Amos 5:18-20](#); [Zep 1:14-18](#)] ² “But for you who fear My name [i.e. humble believers who serve the Lord], the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings [i.e. vindication for the righteous who follow the Lord; “the sun of vindication will rise with healing wings” – NET]; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall [skip freely in an open pasture after having been in a stall all day]. ³ “You [the humble righteous] will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ “Remember [זָכַר *zakar* – recall to mind] the law of Moses My servant [their guide for righteous living], even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel [which applied to Malachi’s audience]. ⁵ “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD [cf. [Matt 11:7-10](#)]. ⁶ “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers [John the Baptist had an Elijah-like ministry in that he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” ([Luke 1:17](#))], so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Summary:

This pericope opens with a reminder about God’s future day of judgment that is coming. The Lord declares, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze... so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal 4:1). This time of judgment is commonly called “the day of the Lord”, a phrase that appears eighteen times in the Old Testament (Isa 13:6, 9; 58:13; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 1:15; Zep 1:7, 14; Mal 4:5)¹⁹ and five times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Pet 3:7-14). The “day of the Lord” refers to when God will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous. From Scripture we can say with certainty that the “day of the Lord” follows the first coming of Christ, (Mal. 4:5), will come upon the entire world (Joel 2:1-11; 30-31; 3:12-15; Isa 13:6-11; Ezek 30:2-4; Obad 1:15), will be inescapable (Amos 5:18-20), is a day of wrath and destruction (Zep 1:14-18), will come unannounced (1 Thess 5:1-2; 2 Pet 3:10), and will follow the coming of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:1-4). The church will not experience this time of God’s judgment, for we are waiting for the return of Christ from heaven, “who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10; cf. 5:9). The period refers to the seven-year Tribulation (Rev chapters 6-18) and will end with the Battle of Armageddon (Rev 19:11-21), at which time Christ will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Rev 20:1-6).

¹⁹ The day of the Lord appears twice in Amos 5:18 and Zephaniah 1:14.

The end of the Tribulation and coming millennial kingdom seems to be in view of Malachi in which the Lord declares, “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing” (Mal 4:2-3). “In the kingdom, righteousness will pervade like the sun. *Healing in its wings* (or rays) refers to the restorative powers of righteousness, which are like the healthful rays of the sun. God’s people will be spiritually restored and renewed.”²⁰ With this future time of judgment and blessing certainly coming, Malachi’s generation should have been more mindful about how they lived before the Lord, adhering to the Mosaic Law, which was the standard for right-living for the nation. God had already confronted them concerning sacrifices (Mal 1:7-14), idolatry (Mal 2:10-11), and not giving tithes (Mal 3:8-9), and finally exhorts them to “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel” (Mal 4:4).

Finally, God gives a prophecy concerning the future coming day of judgment. He declares, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal 4:5-6). The Gospel of Luke reveals John the Baptist had an Elijah-like ministry in that he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). If Israel had accepted Jesus as the Messiah and His offer of the kingdom, then John the Baptist would have fulfilled this prophecy (Matt 11:7-14).

The Lord promised to send His people Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrived. An angel later told John the Baptist’s parents that their son would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Yet John denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21–23). Jesus said that John would have been the Elijah who was to come if the people of his day had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Matt 11:14). Since they did not, John did not fulfill this prophecy about Elijah coming, though he did fulfill the prophecy about Messiah’s forerunner (Mal 3:1).²¹

The apostle John reveals there will be an Elijah-like prophet—as well as a Moses-like prophet—who will come in the future, during the time of the Tribulation, and he will also help prepare the way of the Lord (Rev 11:4-6). Those who hate the Lord will reject His future prophet and celebrate his death (Rev 11:7-10); however, God will resurrect him and call him to heaven (Rev 11:11-12), and render judgment upon the wicked (Rev 11:13). Malachi was the last of the OT prophets, and another prophet would not arise until

²⁰ Craig A. Blaising, “Malachi,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1587.

²¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mal 4:5.

John the Baptist, who would shatter the years of silence with the announcement of Jesus' coming.