

Malachi 3:1-18, 4:1-6

The Messiah and His Messenger

Malachi is the last of the prophets who pointed the faithful toward the coming Messiah.

- **1 Peter 1:9-11** - "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

The previous chapter ended with a question from the corrupt priests: "Where is the God of justice?" They complained that it seems that evildoers go unpunished, and life is unfair.

God now answers them:

Malachi 3:1 - "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts."

Later in **Malachi 4:5** He identifies this messenger as Elijah.

The Messiah's coming requires some preparation, which this messenger will provide. This messenger would announce Messiah's coming, describe the route he will take and remove any obstacles.

This is the same messenger described by Isaiah.

- **Isaiah 40:3-5** - "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

...And repeated in Luke 3:4-6 concerning John the Baptist:

- **Luke 3:3-6** - "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

"the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple," - suddenly =

unexpectedly

First as a vulnerable baby recognized by Zechariah and Anna, then as a precocious 12-year-old debating with the scribes. and finally cleansing the Temple of moneychangers, healing the blind and lame and announcing himself as the "light of the world" at Tabernacles.

Finally, on Pentecost the Spirit fell on his disciples suddenly empowering them in the new Temple of His body and leaving behind the old Temple and the covenant of the Law for a new covenant of grace.

This would all happen more than 400 years in the future.

"and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." - All flesh perhaps mean all kinds of flesh, both Jew and Gentile.

This was also prophesied by Joel, and confirmed by Peter on the day of Pentecost:

- **Joel 3:1** - ""And it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy..."

The messenger - in the spirit of Elijah and the person of John the Baptist - will precede the "Messenger of the Covenant" who is identified as the Lord Himself, "whom ye delight in" or rather "desire."

So there are two messengers mentioned here.

The corrupt priests desired to see the God of justice. God explains that He is coming and will unexpectedly come to His Temple. But then He asks His own question:

Malachi 1:2 - ""But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:"

i.e. be careful what you wish for. The coming of the Lord to set things right will disrupt the world system and result in a world turned upside down.

As the prophet Amos also warned:

- **Amos 5:18-19** - "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him..."

In fact, to set things right, Jesus had to die on the cross. The old man is buried, the new man arises. It's pictured again at Pentecost, when the disciples' old identity is burned up in tongues of fire, as the Spirit infuses life in a new creation.

God is still talking to the priests, the "sons of Levi" whose corruption was exhibited even

in the high priest himself.

But the priesthood will be pure in the new covenant, in the days of Messiah. "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." - **Acts 6:7**. But this also relates to the royal priesthood of all believers.

Purification

Malachi 3:3-4 - "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years."

Assayers use caustic chemicals and high heat to separate the dross and other impurities from the pure gold or silver. Tribulation or persecution does this spiritually.

The refiner looks into the open furnace, or pot, and knows that the process of purifying is complete, and the dross all burnt away, when he can see his image plainly reflected in the molten metal.

Maimonides says, "in the days of the King Messiah, when his kingdom is restored, and all Israel shall be gathered to him, all will have their genealogies set right by his mouth, through the Holy Spirit that rests upon him, as it is said, "he shall sit a refiner and purifier"

The "genealogies" in this case mean a spiritual lineage of grace that recognizes us as children of God.

God lists the sins not only of the priests but of the whole people of Israel.

Malachi 3:5 - "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts."

We expect sorcery and adultery to be on the list. But false swearers (those who lie or break promises), those who exploit their workers, squeeze funds from widows and orphans or harass foreign immigrants? Surely God has, as they say, left off preaching and "gone to meddlin"

Malachi 3:6 - "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

God don't ever change! God is the same yesterday, today and forever (**Hebrews 13:8**).

Even though the "sons have Jacob" have continually rebelled against me throughout their history, I have still refrained from destroying them entirely. And in fact even today,

believing Gentiles have been grafted into the tree of Israel along with Jews who have believed in Jesus the Messiah so that "all Israel shall be saved." (**Romans 11:26**)

Malachi 3:7 - "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"

The question carries the assumption of innocence - what have we done wrong?

Robbing God in Tithes and Offerings

Malachi 3:8-9 - "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

We already saw how the priests and people were offering blemished, lame and sick animals for sacrifice. Now that sin was compounded by withholding tithes.

Malachi 3 is often used as encouragement to tithe, with a warning not to "rob God" and with the promise that if the tithes were properly given God would "open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (**Malachi 3:10**)

This is true, of course, but it makes even more sense if we know that in Malachi's day there was an almost "organized crime" type ring that was actually "robbing God" inside the Temple and depriving the Levites of their livelihood (see **Nehemiah 13:4-5**).

When the priests siphoned off tithes from the Levites, the people also kept back their tithes. So the whole people were guilty.

Another sin involved in Jesus' day (**Matthew 23:23**) giving with what the rabbis called "an evil eye" - Giving grudgingly, and not cheerfully, and with an evil intention; not to show gratitude to God, and to acknowledge him as Lord who provided all they had, but in order simply to gain religious merit and appear righteous.

A Promise of Abundance

Malachi 3:10-11 - "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts."

God had commanded three different tithes be given.

First, 10 percent of everyone's increase of agricultural produce and livestock was to be

given to the Levites because they had no inheritance in the land but served in the Temple. The Levites then gave a tenth of that to the priests (**Numbers 18:21-28**).

Second, another tenth was to be stored and used only during the pilgrimage feasts, for eating and drinking in Jerusalem (**Deuteronomy 14:22-27**).

A third tithe gathered every three years was to go to benefit the Levites in their towns during times they were not serving in the Temple, as well as the poor, the stranger (a sojourner or immigrant), and widows and orphans. This was handed out daily from the Temple treasury to those in distress. (**Deuteronomy 14:28-29**)

The total required by all three tithes was a little more than 20 percent of a family's income.

The tithe automatically belonged to the Lord, not to the giver. It wasn't even considered given, it was simply returned to its original owner, God.

Under Jesus' new covenant, the Mosaic Law has been fulfilled in Him, and we are no longer under its burden. (**Romans 7:5-6; Galatians 3:15-4:7; 2 Corinthians 3:4-18**).

- **Romans 6:14** - "...ye are not under the law, but under grace."

However, the idea of a tithe precedes the Law. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek:

- **Genesis 14:18-20** - "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all."

But Christian believers operate under an even more expansive example.

After the day of Pentecost:

- **Acts 2:42-47** - "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

- **2 Corinthians 9:7** - "As every man purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or out of compulsion; for God loveth the cheerful giver."

Many of us give 10 percent - tithing not from obedience to a legal commandment but to acknowledge that all we have comes from God and remains His, we only have

stewardship over it.

- **Psalm 24:1** - "The earth is the LORD 's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein."

It also serves as a reminder that this community's "storehouse" is where we receive spiritual food.

The promise in Malachi about tithing is similar to Jesus' statement about giving in general:

- **Luke 6:38** - "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Malachi's promise continues:

Malachi 3:12 - "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts."

The Targum says, "and all nations shall praise you, because you dwell in the land of the house of my Shechinah or majesty, and do my will in it."

Again we find the Gentiles drawn to and desiring the Promised Land when God's law is obeyed. Israel never accomplished this, but Jesus did.

'It is Vain to Serve God'

Malachi 3:13-14 - "Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?"

The Targum paraphrases the verse: "ye have said, he gains nothing who worships before the Lord; and what mammon (or riches) do we gain because we have kept the observation of his word, and because we have walked in contrition of spirit before the Lord of hosts?"

Such false humility and feigned piety are what Jesus encountered in the Pharisees of His day.

- **Matthew 23:27-28** - "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

Malachi 3:15 - "And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are

set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

i.e. it's as if God doesn't exist. As previous prophets had charged Israel for saying:

- **Ezekiel 8:12** - "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth."

But those who fear the Lord will be delivered and blessed.

Malachi 3:16 - "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."

The "book of remembrance" is probably the Book of Life reserved in heaven.

- **Revelation 20:12** - "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"

(See also **Exodus 32:32-33**; **Psalms 69:28**; **87:6**; **Daniel 12:1**)

Malachi 3:17 - "And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

"jewels" = *səgullâ* - peculiar treasure, special valued property

The word is usually associated with God's people:

- **Deuteronomy 14:2** - "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth."

- **1 Peter 2:9** - "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:"

God will spare them as if they were His only Son. Through salvation, but not from all tribulation and suffering in this world. In fact we are promised tribulation.

- **1 Peter 4:12-13** - "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

Malachi 3:18 - "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

The "righteous" here mean those who have on the wedding garment, the robe of Christ's righteousness, since there is no righteousness in our natural state of fallenness.

Some rabbis understood this to refer to the Resurrection, when the distinction between the righteous and the wicked would be most visible.

But the coming of Jesus made these distinctions apparent. In His presence the wicked "had no cloak for their sin" and were distinguished from those who followed Him.

It could even refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, when believers were told to escape to Pella and were spared.

Malachi 4:1-6

(In the Jewish scriptures, these verses are numbered as a continuation of chapter 3)

Malachi 4:1 - "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

See **Matthew 3:10-12** - "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

- **Obadiah 1:18** - "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it."

Here again we see, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (**Romans 9:13**)

Those of spiritual lineage of Jacob and Joseph, led by the Spirit, will serve as a flame in which the lineage of Esau or Edom will be burned up. This is the threshing floor image fulfilled on the day of Pentecost with the tongues of fire over the disciples' heads. Their old identities in Esau or the flesh were destroyed and their new identity in Christ was revealed.

In a literal sense, this could also be talking about the second destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans. It will be completely fulfilled when the book of life is opened at the Last Judgment.

On the other hand...

Malachi 4:2 - "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

"in his wings" = in his rays or beams of light

Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish philosopher, considered the Logos or Word of God as being depicted by the sun.

The Talmud says "in the world to come, God will bring the sun out of its sheath, and burn the wicked; they will be judged by it, and the righteous will be healed by it."

As the sun is a luminous body, the light of the whole world, so is Christ to the world of men,

- **John 8:12** - "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

"grow up as calves of the stall" - The Septuagint version renders it, "ye shall leap" or "skip as calves loosed from bonds."

NET - "you will skip about like calves released from the stall."

Malachi 4:3 - "And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts."

The original "treading down" prophecy was in Genesis and referred to the Messiah:

- **Genesis 3:15** - "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

- **Romans 16:20** - "...the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

- **Psalms 91:13** - "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

-- **Luke 10:19** - "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Nothing will harm you."

The Talmud interprets this verse of the bodies of the wicked in hell, which "After twelve months, their bodies are consumed, their souls are burned, and a wind scatters them under the soles of the feet of the righteous, as it is stated: "And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet" Malachi 3:21 (4:3 in KJV)."

- Babylonian Talmud, Roshhashanah, fol. 17. 1

Malachi 4:4 - "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments."

"Remember" = *zakar* - remember, be mindful of, mention, think on

All they had to do was repent and turn back to God. That would involve obeying God's commandments in the Torah.

The prophet had already told the corrupt priests to seek the law as their forefather Levi had:

- **Malachi 2:7** - "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."

They were to focus on the Torah. If they did, it would all point to the Coming One, the Messiah.

- **John 5:39** - "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

John the Baptist

Malachi 4:5-6 - "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

This verse is explained by the Angel Gabriel's message to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist:

- **Luke 1:16-17** - "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The Talmud places this prophecy in the days of Messiah. (Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath, fol 118. 1) It also spawned the tradition to leave a place setting for Elijah at Passover in hopes that the prophet will join in.

By preaching repentance, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, would turn the hearts of both fathers and children back to God and to faith in Jesus.

"lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" - the "earth" can also mean the "land"

The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and the curse on the land was inflicted, ravaged by the Romans, the Temple destroyed as well as the city of Jerusalem.

The last word in the Hebrew scriptures is "curse."

The Jews in the synagogue readings, not wanting to end with a curse, would read verse 4:5 again: "Behold I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Lord."

The word for curse, "*cherem*," comes from a root that means "the closing of a net."

Thus the Old Testament was "closed," the curse of the Law (4:4 - "Remember ye the law of Moses") being the immovable object against which we are squeezed by the irresistible force of God's love in Christ. The only escape being the Cross, upon which we die with Christ, and then Christ lives in and through us.

The curse is answered by the cross of Christ, where He became a curse for us (**Galatians 3:13**).

Between Malachi and Matthew, there was a gap of "400 silent years." God did not raise up another prophet in Israel until John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, crying out, "Prepare the way of the Lord" (**Matthew 3:3**).