

Session 14 The Forerunner Message in Malachi 3

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Malachi gave six prophetic messages—Oracle one: God’s love for Israel (1:2-5); Oracle two: unfaithful priests (1:6-2:9); Oracle three: divorce (2:10-16); Oracle four: God’s justice (2:17-3:6); Oracle five: dishonoring and robbing God (3:7-12); Oracle six: the day of the Lord (3:13-4:6).
- B. His first prophetic message proclaimed God’s love for Israel (1:2-5). The Lord emphasized His love for Israel (Deut. 4:32-40; 7:7-11; 10:12-22; 15:16; 23:5; 33:2-5; Isa. 43:4; Hos. 11:1, 3-4, 8-9).
¹The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. ²“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved, ³but Esau I have hated and laid waste his mountains...” (Mal. 1:1-3)
- C. The Lord answered their doubts about His love for them by asking if Esau was not Jacob’s brother. The implication is that although these twins were sons of Isaac and called by God, yet God loved Jacob the younger and hated Esau by giving him the desolate mountains of Seir as his inheritance, whereas He gave Jacob the beautiful promised land and covenant promises related to the Messiah.
- D. The norm was for the eldest son to be the primary heir. But God sovereignly chose Jacob over Esau (Rom. 9:13). God loves everyone (Jn. 3:16). Malachi 1:2-3 is about God’s sovereign choice regarding Jacob and Esau *as nations*—it is not a statement of His love for them as individuals. When He said that He hated Esau, it meant that He did not choose Esau to be the nation from which the Messiah would both come and reign. He made this choice before their birth (Rom. 9:10-13).
- E. Malachi probably prophesied in the period when Nehemiah returned to Persia in the twelfth year of his governorship (432-431 BC; Neh. 5:14; 13:6). Malachi was one of the three restoration prophets along with Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied after Zerubbabel returned from Babylon.
- F. Outline of Malachi 3
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| Malachi 3 | The messenger |
| 3:1-6 | The coming of the Lord’s messengers |
| 3:7-10b | Israel must return to the Lord |
| 3:10c-12 | The Lord’s promise of great blessing |
| 3:13-15 | Israel’s complaints about serving the Lord |
| 3:16-18 | The Lord’s delight in His people |
- G. Israel complained against the Lord (2:17), saying that every evildoer was approved in God’s sight and asking where the God of justice is. (2:17). They assumed, because God did not intervene, that He approved of their sin. They expressed cynicism about God establishing justice (2:17).

¹⁷You have wearied the LORD with your words...in that you say, “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)

II. THE COMING OF THE LORD’S MESSENGERS (MAL. 3:1-6)

- A. God’s response to the cynical Jews of 2:17 is to send Jesus, the messenger of the covenant (3:1). The Lord answered their hypocritical complaints against Him for not intervening to establish justice by announcing a future day of justice when the Lord “whom they sought” in 2:17 would come.

¹“Behold, I send My messenger [John the Baptist and later Elijah], and he will prepare the way before Me [Father and Jesus]. And the Lord [Jesus], whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant [Jesus], in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal. 3:1)

1. ***I send My messenger:*** The Father would send a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. Jesus identified the messenger as John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10; Lk 7:27; cf. Mk. 1:2; Jn. 1:23).
 - a. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, partially fulfilling the prophecy in 4:5 of Elijah coming in the end times (Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Mk. 9:11-13; Lk. 1:13-17).

¹⁷“He [John the Baptist] will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...to make ready a people...for the Lord.” (Lk. 1:17)
 - b. The total fulfillment of 3:1 is in the future coming of Elijah and Jesus. The prophecies in both 3:1 and 4:5 are connected to John the Baptist and the future return of Elijah (Mt. 11:10, 14). Mark 1:2-3 combines Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.
2. ***He will prepare the way before Me:*** The Father sent John the Baptist to prepare the way “before Me,” speaking of before the Father in 3:1 and before the Son in Matthew 11:10. The Father and His Messenger are both manifested in Jesus as “the One sent by the Father” (Jn. 3:17; 3:34; 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28-33; 12:44-49; etc.).

¹⁰For this is he of whom it is written: “Behold, I send My messenger [the Father’s] before Your face [Jesus], who will prepare Your way before You [Jesus].” (Mt. 11:10)
3. ***The Lord will suddenly come to His temple:*** Jesus came to His temple “suddenly” at His first coming (Lk. 2:22; Jn. 2:13-22) and will again come to His temple when He returns. The Lord, whom the Israelites were seeking in 2:15, will come to His temple (Ezek. 43:1-7; Zech. 8:3).
4. ***The Messenger of the covenant:*** Jesus is “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Heb. 9:15; 10:16; cf. Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus also administrates the Sinai covenant that promised judgment for rebellion (Deut. 28:15-68). Israel will delight in Jesus, “the Desire of All nations.”

7“...I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [Jesus], and I will fill this temple with glory,” says the LORD of hosts. (Hag 2:7)

5. ***Behold, He is coming:*** The Jews did not delight in Jesus at His first coming. This is a promise of His second coming, when He established justice (2:17). This coming is based on Isaiah 40:3-5 when God’s glory is seen by all flesh together—at the time Jesus returns.

3“Prepare the way of the LORD...⁴Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low...⁵The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...” (Isa 40:3-5)

- B. At the time of Jesus’ second coming, He will purify and cleanse His people (3:2-4).

²But 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 launderers’ soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD... (Mal. 3:2-4)

1. ***The day of His coming:*** The day of His coming is introduced here and elaborated on in 4:5.
2. ***Who can endure or stand?:*** When Jesus returns, no one will be able to stand before Him in their own strength or righteousness, but will only stand by walking in His grace.
3. ***He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap:*** The multiple pictures of the Lord cleansing His people by fire and soap emphasize His thoroughness. The Lord’s fire purifies; He destroys sin and impurity by removing both it and those who refuse to repent of sin.
4. ***He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver:*** The Lord is compared to a silversmith who bends over a small smelting fire, working a piece of silver until the dross is removed from it.
5. ***He will purify the sons of Levi:*** The refining process will begin with the Levites who were responsible for Israel’s spiritual failure, and then it will include the whole nation (3:4).
6. ***Offer offerings in righteousness:*** Jesus’ purifying of leaders will be so effective that their offerings will please God. At His first coming, a small remnant in Israel was saved (Acts 1-6).
7. ***The offering of Judah and Jerusalem:*** Judah and Jerusalem represent the whole nation (1:1).

- C. After God purifies the priests, He will judge wickedness in all Israel, yet He will save a remnant (3:5-6). The ultimate fulfillment of this will occur related to Jesus’ return. Malachi focused on the refining process in Israel, while Isaiah and others also emphasized judgment of the nations (Isa. 24).

⁵“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me... ⁶For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” (Mal. 3:5-6)

1. ***I will come near you for judgment:*** The Lord assured those who complained against Him in 2:17 that He would draw near to them, but as a witness against their sin.

2. ***I will be a swift witness:*** Throughout history the Lord has shown Himself to be patient in confronting the sin in His people and in the nations. There is coming a time when He will be a “swift witness” against sin. He will *quickly* confront those who rebel against Him. His “swift witness” mode of releasing His judgments will be seen in full force in the Tribulation.
 - a. Jesus held His peace or was “silent” in terms of not openly releasing the fullness of His judgments to confront rebellion. He restrained Himself according to Father’s timetable.

¹³The LORD shall go forth [Jesus’ return]...like a man of war... He shall prevail against His enemies. ¹⁴“I have held My peace [been silent] a long time; I have been still and restrained Myself...¹⁵I will lay waste the mountains...” (Isa. 42:13-15)
 - b. Swift judgment begins in the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). The church in Jerusalem experienced this when Ananias and Sapphira were judged quickly for lying (Acts 5).
3. ***Sins against the covenant:*** 1. sorcery; 2. adultery; 3. lying; 4. exploiting laborers, widows, and the fatherless; 5. refusing to help foreigners—these actions result from not fearing God.
4. ***I do not change*** (3:6): The Lord is always holy, loving, just, faithful, gracious, and merciful. Passages indicating that “He changes His mind” refer to changing to a new course of action. They involve His actions, not His character, principles, or promises. If He did not allow a change in actions, then He would be unresponsive; if He changed His character, He would be unreliable. God’s knowledge never changes, but He is a *graciously relational, sovereign* God.
5. ***You are not consumed:*** A remnant in Israel or the sons of Jacob exists because the Lord does not change. He is faithful to His promise never to consume or destroy Israel completely.

III. ISRAEL MUST RETURN TO THE LORD (MAL. 3:7-10b)

- A. The Lord called Israel to return to Him, with the promise that He would return to them (3:7-10).

⁷“...return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ ⁸Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this...if I will not...pour out for you such blessing... (Mal. 3:7-10)
- B. ***Return to Me:*** Israel’s national repentance is deeply related to the release of her national promises (Acts 3:19-21). The Lord will fully “turn to Israel” in the context of His sending Jesus to them.

¹⁹Repent...that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord ²⁰and that He may send Jesus...²¹whom heaven must receive [retain] until the times of restoration of all things...spoken by...all His holy prophets... (Acts 3:19-21)
- C. ***I will return to you:*** The Lord will not “return” to Israel to release the fullness of His promises until Israel turns to Him. This will happen in context to Jesus’ return and their national salvation.

- D. ***You have robbed Me***: Israel robbed God by withholding their tithes. During Nehemiah’s absence from the land the Jewish people neglected to tithe and, thus, support the temple staff. Therefore, the Levites had to leave their jobs in the temple service to get jobs in the fields (Neh. 13:10-12). Malachi probably said this during the period that Nehemiah temporarily left Israel to return Persia.
- E. ***You are cursed with a curse***: The curse on their land was related to the nation robbing God. The curse included crop failure and diseased livestock (Hag. 1:4-11) resulting from drought and locusts.
- F. ***Bring all the tithes into the storehouse***: The Lord does not want half-heartedness or partial service. The tithes supported the priests and Levites who served in the temple or God’s house (Ex. 29:27-28; Lev. 7:32-34; 10:14; Num. 5:9; 6:20; 15:17-21).
- G. ***The storehouse***: There were special rooms in the temple complex built to store the offerings.
- H. ***Food in My house***: This spoke of financially supporting the Levites, enabling them to purchase food, care for their families, etc.
- I. ***Try Me in this***: He invites His people to test Him to see if His promises of blessing are reliable.

IV. THE LORD’S PROMISE OF GREAT BLESSING (MAL. 3:10-12)

- A. God promised to provide abundant harvests and protect the crops from animals and diseases that might destroy them. All other nations would acknowledge divine blessing on the Israelites because their land would be such a delightful place.

¹⁰“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse...and try Me now in this...If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. ¹¹I will rebuke the devourer...so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground...¹²And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land”... (Mal. 3:10-12)
- B. ***I will open the windows of heaven***: This spoke of God sending abundant rain instead of drought. There will not be room enough to receive the blessing from such a great increase of their harvests.
- C. ***I will rebuke the devourer***: The result is that the devourer would not destroy their crops. The “devourer” describes something that “eats,” and it is used as an idiom of destruction. It may speak of fire (Hos. 8:14), invading armies (Jer. 30:16), locusts that destroy crops (Deut. 28:38-52), etc.
- D. ***All nations will call you blessed***: Jerusalem will be delightful and praised by all nations (Isa. 62). The result of turning to God is that Israel would become a trophy of grace, blessed by all nations.

V. ISRAEL’S COMPLAINTS ABOUT SERVING THE LORD (MAL. 3:13-15)

- A. Israel’s arrogant complacency toward the Lord (3:13-15): They concluded that it was useless to seek and serve the Lord since it did not seem to lead to an increase of their finances (3:14).

¹³“Your words have been harsh against Me...yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’
¹⁴You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?’ ¹⁵So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.” (Mal. 3:13-15)

- B. **Your words have been harsh against Me:** The people who did not seek the Lord with humility talked among themselves with harsh words against the Lord similar to the accusations of 2:17. In the end times, many people will say harsh things about the Lord (Jude 15).

¹⁴...“the Lord comes...¹⁵to execute judgment on all, to convict all...of all their ungodly deeds... and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” (Jude 14-15)

- C. **It is useless to serve God:** They claimed to have served the Lord to no benefit. When Israel “mourned” over their failures and sins, they did not feel their finances or circumstances improved.
- D. **Now we call the proud blessed:** They affirmed the proud (who did not seek or fear the Lord) as being blessed. They saw the wicked “raised up” or be prosperous in the marketplace, and they saw those who “tempted God” go free without any negative consequences or judgment. They concluded the righteous were not rewarded and the wicked were not judged for defying the Lord (Eccl. 8:11).

¹¹Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Eccl. 8:11)

VI. THE LORD’S DELIGHT IN HIS PEOPLE (MAL. 3:16-18)

- A. Some of the people in Malachi’s generation walked faithfully in the fear of the Lord (3:16-18). There will be a great harvest of Jewish believers who walk in a close relationship with Jesus.

¹⁶Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. ¹⁷“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD...“On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son...” ¹⁸Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Mal. 3:16-18)

- B. **A book of remembrance:** The Lord listened and heard the conversations and meditations of those who feared God. He recorded them in a “book of remembrance” written before Him (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).
1. The Lord heard the harsh words in 3:13. He also heard the words of those who feared Him.
 2. The Lord is not an idle spectator of what is happening or being said in Israel. He takes note of everything and has a book of remembrance in His presence that honors those who fear Him.
- C. **They shall be Mine:** The Lord will declare that Israel is His special possession before all nations (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 26:18-19).

¹⁸Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you...

¹⁹and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD... (Deut. 26:18-19)

- D. ***I make them My jewels:*** The Lord will openly display how precious and valuable Israel is to Him.
- E. ***I will spare them:*** The Lord will protect and deliver a remnant of His people in context to the Great Tribulation judgments. God will have compassion on those who call out to Him (Joel 2:18, 32).
- F. ***Israel shall discern between the righteous and the wicked:*** This speaks of a day when the Lord will openly separate the righteous from the wicked. Then Israel will be able to see clearly the great benefit of serving the Lord against the consequences of not serving Him.
1. This is the Lord's answer to the accusation that He does not distinguish between evil and good (2:17), that He does not honor the righteous who seek and serve Him (3:13-15).
 2. One great problem in Israel and all the nations today is that they can see no clear lines distinguishing His truth from the moral and theological confusion of so many in the culture.
- G. ***On the day:*** This speaks of the time when Jesus returns and is received by Israel as their King. The day of the Lord will come with the fire of judgment and glorious blessing to His people (4:1-2).
- ¹***“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble...***²***But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.”*** (Mal. 4:1-2)