

RETURN TO ME

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary
on the Book of Malachi



By Dr. Paul Crawford

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Preface

The book of Malachi stands at a unique and solemn place in the Old Testament. It is the final prophetic voice before centuries of silence, and its message is both searching and hopeful. Malachi speaks to a people who had returned from exile, rebuilt the temple, restored public worship, and yet gradually allowed their devotion to God to grow cold.

The outward forms of religion remained, but the inward fire had weakened.

The priests were careless in worship. The people questioned God's love. Marriages were being treated lightly. Offerings were being withheld. Some had become cynical about serving the Lord, while others wondered whether righteousness was worth the effort.

Into that spiritual condition came the unmistakable voice of God:

"Return to Me, and I will return to you."

That invitation forms the heartbeat of this commentary.

Malachi is not merely a book of rebuke. It is a book of covenant faithfulness. Again and again, God confronts sin because He desires restoration. He exposes hypocrisy because He calls His people back to genuine worship. He warns of judgment because He is holy. He promises a coming Messenger because redemption is drawing near.

The book therefore looks in two directions at once.

It looks backward to the covenant God made with Israel, reminding the people of His law, His holiness, and His faithfulness.

At the same time, it looks forward to the coming of the Lord, the promised Messenger, the refining work of God, and the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

Malachi closes the Old Testament with expectation.

The final pages of the Old Testament do not end with despair. They end with anticipation.

A messenger will come.

The Lord will come.

The proud will not prosper forever.

Those who fear the Lord will be remembered.

The Sun of Righteousness will rise.

That makes Malachi profoundly relevant for believers today.

We also live in a time when outward religion can easily replace inward devotion. Churches can remain active while hearts become distant. Worship can become routine. Scripture can be heard without being obeyed. People can speak about God while slowly losing reverence for Him.

Malachi forces us to ask difficult questions.

Do we still honor God with our best?

Do we worship Him with reverence?

Do we take His Word seriously?

Are we faithful in our homes?

Are we trusting Him with what He has given us?

Do we believe that serving the Lord is worthwhile even when wickedness seems to prosper?

Most importantly, are our hearts truly turned toward Him?

This commentary was written to walk carefully through Malachi verse by verse, allowing the text to speak with its full force. My goal is not merely to explain what Malachi meant to the people of his own generation, but also to show how its truths continue to confront, correct, encourage, and strengthen the people of God today.

Throughout these pages, special attention will be given to the historical setting, key theological themes, prophetic connections, practical applications, and the relationship between Malachi and the New Testament.

The reader will encounter themes such as God's covenant love, acceptable worship, spiritual leadership, faithfulness in marriage, divine justice, repentance, giving, the fear of the Lord, the coming Messenger, the Refiner's fire, the Day of the Lord, and the promise of the Sun of Righteousness.

These themes are not isolated theological ideas. They touch the heart of Christian discipleship.

Malachi reminds us that God is not satisfied with empty religion.

He desires the heart.

He does not want worship that merely appears respectable.

He desires worship that honors His name.

He does not call His people simply to perform religious duties.

He calls them to return to Him.

That call is as urgent today as it was when Malachi first delivered it.

As you study this book, my prayer is that you will not read it merely as an ancient prophetic message, but as a living summons to renewed faithfulness.

May these pages deepen your reverence for God, strengthen your confidence in His unchanging character, sharpen your understanding of His Word, and prepare your heart for the coming King.

Above all, may the message of Malachi become personal:

Return to Me.

That is the invitation.

That is the challenge.

And that is the hope.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Prologue

The temple stood.

The sacrifices continued.

The priests still wore their garments.

The people still gathered.

From outward appearance, the religion of Israel remained alive.

But something was wrong.

The fire had grown cold.

Generations had passed since the Jewish people returned from Babylonian exile. Jerusalem had been rebuilt. The temple had been restored. The walls of the city once again stood around the people of God. The great promises of restoration had seemed to be unfolding.

Yet the spiritual condition of the nation had begun to deteriorate.

The people had expected dramatic blessing after their return.

Instead, life had become difficult.

The glory they hoped to see had not appeared in the way they imagined. The kingdom had not been restored to its former greatness. Foreign powers still dominated the political world. Economic hardship weighed heavily upon many families.

Disappointment slowly became discouragement.

Discouragement became indifference.

Indifference became spiritual compromise.

The people still believed in God, but many had stopped honoring Him as they once had.

The priests still offered sacrifices, but some began presenting animals that were blind, crippled, or sick.

The people still spoke about righteousness, but some wondered whether serving God really mattered.

Some questioned whether God truly loved them.

Others questioned whether He was just.

Marriage covenants were being violated.

Worship became routine.

Giving became reluctant.

Faithfulness became negotiable.

And then God spoke.

Through the prophet Malachi came a message that cut through the spiritual numbness of the nation.

God reminded His people of something they had forgotten.

He still loved them.

He had not abandoned His covenant.

He had not changed.

The problem was not that God had moved away from His people.

His people had moved away from Him.

That is why one of the most powerful statements in the entire book comes from the Lord Himself:

“Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Those words contain both confrontation and invitation.

They confront the reality of spiritual distance.

But they also reveal the heart of God.

He calls His people back.

Malachi is therefore much more than a collection of warnings.

It is a divine appeal.

God confronts corrupt worship because He desires true worship.

He rebukes unfaithful priests because He desires faithful spiritual leadership.

He condemns broken covenants because He values faithfulness.

He exposes selfishness because He desires trust.

He warns of judgment because He is holy.

And He promises a coming Messenger because redemption is approaching.

Malachi stands at the threshold of a great transition in biblical history.

After this prophetic voice grows silent, centuries will pass before another prophet appears in Israel.

Then, in the wilderness of Judea, a voice will cry out.

A messenger will prepare the way.

John the Baptist will call the people to repentance.

And after him will come the One Malachi anticipated.

Jesus Christ.

The Lord whom the people sought would come.

The Messenger of the covenant would appear.

The long silence would end.

The promises would begin to unfold.

For this reason, Malachi is not merely the ending of the Old Testament.

It is a doorway.

On one side stands the history of Israel, the law of Moses, the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices, and the prophets.

On the other side stands the coming Messiah.

Malachi connects them.

The book looks backward and forward at the same time.

It looks backward and says:

Remember.

Remember God's covenant.

Remember His holiness.

Remember His law.

Remember His faithfulness.

But Malachi also looks forward and says:

Prepare.

Prepare for the Messenger.

Prepare for the Lord.

Prepare for the Refiner.

Prepare for the Day that is coming.

That message remains deeply relevant.

Many people today still maintain the outward appearance of faith while gradually losing inward devotion.

Church attendance can continue while prayer weakens.

Bible reading can continue while obedience fades.

Worship songs can be sung while the heart remains distant.

Religious vocabulary can remain while reverence disappears.

Malachi refuses to allow us to hide behind outward religion.

The book asks whether God truly has our hearts.

It asks whether we honor Him.

It asks whether our worship is genuine.

It asks whether we trust Him.

It asks whether we remain faithful when obedience becomes difficult.

And it asks whether we are prepared for the coming of the Lord.

These questions are uncomfortable.

They are meant to be.

Malachi was written to disturb spiritual complacency.

But the purpose of that disturbance is restoration.

The same God who exposes sin also invites repentance.

The same God who warns of judgment also promises mercy.

The same God who speaks of refining fire also promises healing.

The same God who declares that the wicked will face judgment also promises that the Sun of Righteousness will rise upon those who fear His name.

The message of Malachi can therefore be summarized in a single movement:

From coldness to devotion.

From compromise to faithfulness.

From distance to fellowship.

From rebellion to repentance.

From darkness to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

The journey begins with one command.

Return.

Before we examine the first verse, before we explore the history, doctrine, prophecy, and application of this remarkable book, we must hear the invitation that stands at its center.

The Lord is still calling.

Return to Me.

For those willing to hear that call, the book of Malachi is not merely the final word of the Old Testament.

It is the beginning of renewal.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Malachi Chapter 1 — When Worship Loses Its Honor

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Malachi Chapter 1 begins with one of the most important truths God's people can ever understand:

God loves His people.

Yet Israel had begun to question that love.

God said:

“I have loved you.”

But Israel responded:

“How have You loved us?”

Their spiritual condition had become so cold that they could no longer recognize the evidence of God's covenant love.

The problem quickly becomes even more serious.

The priests, who were responsible for leading the people in worship, had begun treating God's altar with contempt. They offered blind, lame, sick, and defective animals to the Lord.

They were giving God what they would never have dared to give an earthly governor.

Their worship had become careless.

Their sacrifices had become convenient.

Their service had become burdensome.

Their reverence had disappeared.

Malachi 1 therefore confronts one of the greatest dangers in spiritual life:

It is possible to continue practicing religion while losing genuine reverence for God.

The central message of this chapter is clear:

God is a great King, and He deserves wholehearted worship.

I. GOD SENDS HIS WORD TO HIS PEOPLE

Malachi 1:1 — The Burden of the Lord

“The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.”

Malachi begins by describing his message as a **burden**.

The Hebrew idea behind the word can refer to a weighty message or divine declaration placed upon God's messenger.

Malachi was not presenting personal opinions.

He was delivering the Word of the Lord.

Cross References

Nahum 1:1

This is the message concerning Nineveh. It is the record of the vision that Nahum, who was from Elkosh, received from God.

Habakkuk 1:1

This is the message that Habakkuk the prophet received from God in a vision.

Zechariah 9:1

This is the burden of the word of the Lord concerning the land of Hadrach, with Damascus as its resting place, because the eyes of mankind and all the tribes of Israel belong to the Lord.

Malachi's message was serious because it came from God.

Spiritual Principle

When God speaks, His people must listen.

Scripture is not merely religious literature.

It carries divine authority.

God's people do not have the right to accept the portions they enjoy while ignoring the portions that confront them.

Application

When you read Scripture, ask:

What is God revealing about Himself?

What is God revealing about me?

What needs to change because of what He has said?

II. GOD DECLARES HIS LOVE

Malachi 1:2 — “I Have Loved You”

“‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord. Yet you say, ‘How have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? declares the Lord. Yet I loved Jacob.”

God begins His message with love.

Before addressing Israel's failure, God reminds them of His grace.

He says:

“I have loved you.”

Yet Israel questions Him.

“How have You loved us?”

Their circumstances had apparently caused them to doubt God's goodness.

God answers by pointing to His sovereign covenant choice involving Jacob and Esau.

Cross References

Genesis 25:23

The Lord said to Rebekah, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will come from you and be divided. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

Deuteronomy 7:7

The Lord did not set His love upon you and choose you because you were greater in number than other peoples, because you were actually the smallest of all peoples.

Deuteronomy 4:37

Because He loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, He personally brought you out of Egypt by His great power.

Israel's relationship with God began with God's gracious initiative.

They had not earned His covenant love.

Key Truth

God's love should be measured by His character and His promises—not merely by our present circumstances.

There are times when God's people may not understand what He is doing.

But difficulty does not mean God has stopped loving His people.

Application

Never allow temporary circumstances to erase your memory of God's faithfulness.

When your circumstances cause you to ask,

“Does God really love me?”

look back at what God has already done.

III. JACOB AND ESAU

Malachi 1:3 — God's Judgment Upon Edom

“But Esau I hated. I made his mountains a wasteland and left his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

This is strong language.

God contrasts His covenant relationship with Jacob and His judgment upon Esau's descendants, the nation of Edom.

The language emphasizes God's sovereign distinction between the two nations and His righteous judgment against Edom.

Cross References

Romans 9:13

As Scripture says, “I loved Jacob, but Esau I hated.”

Obadiah 1:10

Because of the violence you committed against your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be destroyed forever.

Jeremiah 49:17

Edom will become a place of horror. Everyone who passes by it will be shocked and will shake his head because of all the disasters that have fallen upon it.

Edom had repeatedly opposed Israel.

God's judgment was not arbitrary injustice.

Edom's history was marked by pride, hostility, and violence.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience should never be mistaken for indifference toward sin.

God may allow rebellion to continue for a time.

But He remains righteous.

His judgment is certain.

IV. HUMAN PRIDE CANNOT OVERRULE GOD

Malachi 1:4 — “We Will Rebuild”

“Though Edom says, ‘We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins,’ this is what the Lord of hosts says: ‘They may build, but I will tear down. They will be called the Wicked Land, the people against whom the Lord is angry forever.’”

Edom believed determination could overcome divine judgment.

They said:

“We will rebuild.”

God said:

“I will tear down.”

This demonstrates the limits of human pride.

Cross References

Obadiah 1:4

“Even if you rise as high as the eagle and make your home among the stars, I will bring you down from there,” declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 49:16

The fear you caused others and the pride of your heart have deceived you. You live among the rocky cliffs and occupy the heights of the hills. Even if you build your home as high as an eagle's nest, I will bring you down from there,” declares the Lord.

Isaiah 34:5

The Lord says, “My sword has completed its work in the heavens. Now it will come down in judgment upon Edom, upon the people I have devoted to destruction.”

Human determination cannot overturn God's sovereign decree.

Spiritual Principle

What God opposes cannot ultimately prosper.

Human pride says:

“I will.”

Faith says:

“If the Lord wills.”

Application

There is nothing wrong with rebuilding after difficulty.

But rebuilding in rebellion against God is another matter entirely.

The question is not simply:

“What do I want to build?”

The greater question is:

“Is God in what I am building?”

V. GOD'S GREATNESS EXTENDS BEYOND ISRAEL

Malachi 1:5 — “Great Is the Lord”

“You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’”

God's greatness is not confined to one geographical location.

He is not merely Israel's local deity.

He is Lord over all creation.

Cross References

Psalm 48:1

The Lord is great and deserves the highest praise in the city of our God, on His holy mountain.

Psalm 113:4

The Lord is exalted above every nation, and His glory is higher than the heavens.

Psalm 35:27

Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad. Let them continually say, “The Lord is great! He delights in the well-being of His servant.”

Key Truth

The greatness of God is universal.

Nations rise.

Nations fall.

Empires appear.

Empires disappear.

But God remains King.

VI. GOD DESERVES HONOR

Malachi 1:6 — “Where Is My Honor?”

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then 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. But you say, “How have we despised Your name?”

God confronts the priests directly.

Even ordinary human relationships recognized principles of honor.

A son honored his father.

A servant respected his master.

Yet the priests claimed God as Father and Master while failing to honor Him.

Cross References

Isaiah 1:2

Listen, heavens, and hear, earth, because the Lord has spoken: “I raised children and cared for them, but they have rebelled against Me.”

Deuteronomy 32:6

Is this how you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who created you? Did He not make you and establish you?

Leviticus 19:3

Every one of you must respect your mother and father, and you must keep My Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

The priests had religious positions but lacked genuine reverence.

Spiritual Principle

Calling God “Father” means little if our lives consistently refuse to honor Him.

Reverence is not merely what we say during worship.

It is demonstrated by how we live.

Application

Ask yourself:

Does the way I live demonstrate that I believe God deserves honor?

VII. DEFILED WORSHIP

Malachi 1:7 — Contempt for God's Table

“You present defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The Lord’s table is contemptible.’”

The priests had become careless about worship.

They continued offering sacrifices, but they no longer treated the altar as holy.

Cross References

Leviticus 22:20

You must not offer anything that has a defect, because such an offering will not be accepted for you.

Deuteronomy 15:21

If an animal has a defect—if it is lame, blind, or has any other serious defect—you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.

Ezekiel 44:7

You brought foreigners who were uncircumcised in heart and body into My sanctuary and allowed them to dishonor My house while you offered My food, fat, and blood. In this way you broke My covenant in addition to all your other detestable practices.

God had clearly established standards regarding sacrifices.

The priests knew God's requirements.

Their sin therefore involved deliberate disregard for God's holiness.

Key Truth

Familiarity with holy things can become dangerous when familiarity produces contempt instead of reverence.

VIII. WOULD YOU GIVE GOD LESS THAN A GOVERNOR?

Malachi 1:8 — Blind, Lame, and Sick Sacrifices

“When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer the lame or sick, is that not evil? Try offering them to your governor—would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the Lord of hosts.

God exposes their hypocrisy with a devastating comparison.

They were offering God gifts they would never have offered an earthly official.

Cross References

Leviticus 22:22

You must not offer to the Lord an animal that is blind, injured, crippled, diseased, or has sores. You must not place such an animal upon the altar as an offering to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 17:1

You must not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or sheep that has any defect or serious flaw, because that would be detestable to the Lord your God.

2 Samuel 24:24

But the king said to Araunah, “No. I insist on paying you for it. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty pieces of silver.

David understood something the priests in Malachi's day had forgotten:

God deserves our best.

Spiritual Principle

Worship that costs us nothing may reveal how little we value the One we worship.

This does not mean worship earns God's favor.

It means genuine love refuses to treat God as an afterthought.

IX. RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY CANNOT REPLACE REPENTANCE

Malachi 1:9 — Asking for God's Favor

“Now plead with God to be gracious to us. But with such offerings from your hands, will He accept you?” says the Lord of hosts.

The priests wanted God's blessing while continuing behavior that dishonored Him.

They wanted favor without repentance.

Cross References

Psalm 66:18

If I had cherished sin in my heart and refused to turn from it, the Lord would not have listened to me.

Isaiah 1:15

When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will turn My eyes away from you. Even though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, because your hands are covered with blood.

Micah 3:4

Then they will cry to the Lord, but He will not answer them. He will hide His face from them at that time because of the evil they have done.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer is not a substitute for repentance.

We cannot deliberately dishonor God while expecting religious activity to compensate for disobedience.

X. GOD WOULD RATHER CLOSE THE DOORS THAN ACCEPT EMPTY WORSHIP

Malachi 1:10 — “Shut the Temple Doors”

“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle useless fires on My altar! I take no pleasure in you,” says the Lord of hosts, “and I will not accept an offering from your hands.”

These are sobering words.

God says that closing the temple would be preferable to continuing meaningless worship.

Cross References

Isaiah 1:11

“What do I care about all your sacrifices?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed animals. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats when your hearts remain far from Me.”

Amos 5:21

“I hate and reject your religious festivals. I take no pleasure in your solemn gatherings.”

Psalms 51:16

You do not desire sacrifice by itself, or I would give it. You do not delight merely in burnt offerings.

God had commanded sacrifice.

The problem was not the sacrificial system itself.

The problem was worship without the heart.

Important Truth

God is more concerned with sincere worship than religious activity.

A church building can be full.

Songs can be sung.

Sermons can be preached.

Offerings can be collected.

Prayers can be spoken.

And yet hearts can still be far from God.

XI. GOD'S NAME WILL BE GREAT AMONG THE NATIONS

Malachi 1:11 — Worldwide Worship

“For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name will be great among the nations. In every place incense and pure offerings will be presented in My name, because My name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord of hosts.

This verse looks beyond Israel.

God declares that His name will be honored among the nations.

Cross References

Psalm 113:3

From the place where the sun rises to where it sets, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise.

Isaiah 66:19

I will set a sign among the nations and send survivors to distant peoples who have not heard of My fame or seen My glory. They will proclaim My glory among the nations.

Revelation 15:4

Lord, who will not fear You and give glory to Your name? You alone are holy. Every nation will come and worship before You because Your righteous acts have been revealed.

God's purpose has always extended beyond one nation.

His glory will fill the earth.

Spiritual Principle

God will receive the honor He deserves.

If one generation refuses to honor Him, God's glory is not diminished.

His name will ultimately be praised throughout the earth.

XII. THE PRIESTS PROFANED WHAT WAS HOLY

Malachi 1:12 — Treating God's Table as Common

“But you profane it by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled, and its food is contemptible.’”

The priests had lost their sense of holiness.

They treated sacred responsibilities casually.

Cross References

Leviticus 21:6

The priests must be holy to their God and must not dishonor His name, because they present the Lord's offerings made by fire, the food of their God. Therefore they must be holy.

Ezekiel 22:26

Her priests have violated My law and treated My holy things as though they were common. They have failed to distinguish between what is holy and what is ordinary, and they have not taught the difference between clean and unclean. They have ignored My Sabbaths, and My name has been dishonored among them.

Leviticus 22:2

Tell Aaron and his sons to treat the holy offerings of the Israelites with proper respect so they will not dishonor My holy name. I am the Lord.

Key Truth

When holy things become ordinary in our minds, irreverence soon follows.

The priests still handled sacrifices.

They still worked around the altar.

But their hearts had changed.

XIII. WHEN SERVING GOD BECOMES A BURDEN

Malachi 1:13 — “What a Burden!”

“And you say, ‘What a burden!’ You sniff at it with disdain,” says the Lord of hosts. “You bring stolen, lame, or sick animals—should I accept these from your hands?” says the Lord.

The priests had reached the point where serving God irritated them.

They said:

“What a burden!”

The privilege of worship had become an inconvenience.

Cross References

Amos 8:5

You say, “When will the New Moon festival be over so we can sell grain again? When will the Sabbath end so we can open the market?” You cheat the people by making the measure smaller, increasing the price, and using dishonest scales.

Isaiah 43:23

You have not brought Me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you by demanding offerings or wearied you with requests for incense.

1 Samuel 2:29

Why do you treat My sacrifices and offerings with contempt? Why do you honor your sons more than Me by making yourselves fat from the best parts of every offering My people Israel bring?

Spiritual Principle

A dangerous spiritual condition develops when serving God feels like an unwanted interruption rather than a privilege.

Ask yourself:

Do I view prayer as a burden?

Do I view Scripture as a burden?

Do I view worship as a burden?

Do I view serving others as a burden?

Do I give God only what is convenient?

Warning

Spiritual weariness can happen to sincere believers.

But contempt is different from weariness.

A tired servant may need rest.

A contemptuous servant needs repentance.

XIV. THE GREAT KING DESERVES OUR BEST

Malachi 1:14 — “I Am a Great King”

“Cursed is the cheat who has a fine male in his flock, but vows to sacrifice it and then offers a blemished one to the Lord. For I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “and My name is to be feared among the nations.”

The chapter ends with God's declaration concerning Himself:

“I am a great King.”

This is the central issue.

Israel's worship was defective because their view of God had become defective.

If they truly understood His greatness, they would never have offered Him their leftovers.

Cross References

Leviticus 22:19

If you want your offering to be accepted, you must offer a male without defect from the cattle, sheep, or goats.

Psalms 47:2

The Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King over all the earth.

Deuteronomy 23:21

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not delay in fulfilling it, because the Lord your God will certainly require it from you, and you would be guilty of sin.

The worshiper in Malachi 1:14 had something acceptable to give.

He promised it to God.

Then he substituted something inferior.

God calls him a cheat.

Spiritual Principle

God deserves what we promised Him, not whatever is left after we have served ourselves.

XV. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM MALACHI 1

1. Never Forget God's Love

Israel asked:

“How have You loved us?”

They had forgotten God's covenant faithfulness.

Principle:

Difficult circumstances do not erase God's faithfulness.

When you struggle to see God's love, remember what He has already done.

2. God Deserves Honor

God asked:

“If I am a Father, where is My honor?”

The priests spoke about God but failed to reverence Him.

Principle:

The way we worship reveals what we believe about God.

A small view of God produces casual worship.

A great view of God produces reverence.

3. God Deserves Our Best

The priests offered blind, lame, and sick animals.

They gave God what they did not want.

David had a different attitude:

“I will not offer to the Lord something that costs me nothing.”

Principle:

God should never receive the leftovers of our lives.

This includes our:

- Time.
 - Attention.
 - Energy.
 - Worship.
 - Service.
 - Resources.
 - Devotion.
-

4. Religious Activity Cannot Replace a Right Heart

The temple was operating.

Sacrifices were being offered.

Priests were serving.

Yet God said:

“I take no pleasure in you.”

Principle:

Activity for God is not necessarily intimacy with God.

We can be busy with religious things while spiritually drifting from the Lord.

5. God Is a Great King

The chapter ends with God's declaration:

“I am a great King.”

This truth corrects everything.

If God is King, He deserves obedience.

If God is Father, He deserves honor.

If God is Master, He deserves respect.

If God is holy, He deserves reverence.

Remember:

True worship begins with seeing God as He really is.

XVI. THE SPIRITUAL DECLINE OF MALACHI 1

Malachi 1 reveals a progression of spiritual decline.

1. They Questioned God's Love

“How have You loved us?”

Gratitude disappeared.

2. They Lost Their Reverence

“Where is My honor?”

God became familiar rather than feared.

3. They Lowered Their Standards

They offered defective sacrifices.

4. They Justified Their Behavior

They repeatedly asked:

“How have we done this?”

They had become spiritually insensitive.

5. Worship Became a Burden

They said:

“What a burden!”

6. They Offered God Their Leftovers

The best was kept.

The inferior was given to God.

7. God's Name Was Dishonored

Their worship contradicted God's greatness.

This progression provides a serious warning.

Spiritual decline usually begins in the heart before it becomes visible in behavior.

XVII. WHAT MALACHI 1 TEACHES US ABOUT WORSHIP

Malachi 1 teaches several essential truths concerning biblical worship.

Worship Begins with God's Worth

The word **worship** carries the idea of recognizing worth.

God deserves worship because of who He is.

Worship Requires Reverence

God is Father.

God is Master.

God is King.

His presence should never be treated casually or contemptuously.

Worship Must Come from the Heart

God rejected offerings because the hearts behind them were corrupt.

Worship Involves Giving God Our Best

The priests offered what was defective.

True worship refuses to treat God as deserving only what remains.

Worship Is Worldwide

God declared:

“My name will be great among the nations.”

One day people from every nation will acknowledge His greatness.

Worship Must Be Sincere

External religious activity means little when the heart is far from God.

XVIII. THE DANGER OF GIVING GOD THE LEFTOVERS

Malachi 1 confronts a tendency that can appear in every generation.

We can give our best attention to everything else and then give God what remains.

Our best energy goes to work.

Our best attention goes to entertainment.

Our best concentration goes to personal interests.

Our best resources go toward ourselves.

Then God receives whatever is left.

The priests did this literally.

They kept the healthy animals and sacrificed the defective ones.

The principle still speaks today.

Ask Yourself:

Does God receive the first and best of my life, or merely what remains?

This does not mean every believer must spend every waking moment engaged in formal religious activity.

It means that God must occupy His rightful place in the heart.

Matthew 6:33

Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and He will provide what you truly need.

The issue is priority.

XIX. MALACHI 1 AND THE HEART OF THE SERVANT

The priests had become professional about worship.

They performed the duties.

But their hearts had cooled.

This is an important warning for pastors, teachers, church leaders, musicians, ministry workers, and every believer.

It is possible to become so familiar with ministry that sacred things begin to feel ordinary.

A pastor can preach without wonder.

A teacher can teach without devotion.

A singer can sing without worship.

A church worker can serve without love.

A believer can pray without really seeking God.

Principle:

Never allow repeated exposure to holy things to cause you to lose your wonder at the holiness of God.

XX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did God begin Malachi's message by saying, "I have loved you"?

God began with His love because Israel needed to remember that His correction came within the context of His covenant relationship with them.

They had begun questioning God's goodness.

Before God exposed their failure, He reminded them of His faithfulness.

Divine correction should not automatically be interpreted as the absence of divine love.

God's love does not mean He ignores sin.

Because He is holy and loving, He calls His people back to Himself.

Question 2

Why did Israel question God's love?

Malachi does not give every detail behind their question, but their words reveal spiritual dissatisfaction.

They looked at their circumstances and apparently concluded that God's love was not evident.

Their mistake was judging God's love only by what they could presently see.

The same temptation exists today.

When prayers appear unanswered or circumstances become difficult, believers can begin questioning truths that God has already revealed.

Lesson:

Do not interpret God's character entirely through changing circumstances. Interpret circumstances through what God has revealed about His character.

Question 3

What does God's choice of Jacob over Esau teach us?

It reminds us that God's relationship with Israel was based upon His sovereign grace rather than Israel's superiority.

Jacob was not chosen because Israel was greater or more deserving.

God's covenant purposes rested upon His own sovereign will.

This should have produced humility and gratitude in Israel.

Instead, they had become spiritually complacent.

Question 4

Why were the priests' sacrifices unacceptable?

The priests offered animals that were blind, lame, sick, stolen, or otherwise defective.

God had specifically commanded that sacrificial animals meet His standards.

Their offerings revealed that they no longer considered God worthy of their best.

Their external actions exposed an internal problem.

Key Truth:

What we are willing to offer God often reveals what we really think about Him.

Question 5

Why did God tell them to offer those animals to their governor?

God was exposing their hypocrisy.

They understood that an earthly ruler deserved respectful treatment.

They knew the governor would reject defective gifts.

Yet they offered worse to God.

The comparison forces them to confront the inconsistency.

They treated an earthly authority with greater respect than the King of heaven.

Question 6

What does Malachi 1:10 mean when God says someone should shut the temple doors?

God was declaring that meaningless worship was worse than no worship at all.

He did not desire empty ritual.

He would rather the sacrifices stop than continue receiving offerings from hearts that openly dishonored Him.

This demonstrates that God evaluates worship by more than external activity.

He sees the heart.

Question 7

What does Malachi 1:11 teach about God's plan for the nations?

It teaches that God's name will be honored far beyond Israel.

From sunrise to sunset, God's greatness will be proclaimed.

The biblical story ultimately points toward worship among all peoples.

Revelation pictures people from the nations recognizing God's holiness and glory.

God's kingdom is global.

Question 8

What was wrong with saying, “What a burden”?

The priests viewed serving God as tiresome and irritating.

They no longer recognized worship as a privilege.

The phrase revealed the condition of their hearts.

There is a difference between becoming physically tired while serving God and despising the service itself.

Faithful servants may become weary.

But when the heart develops contempt for God, repentance is necessary.

Question 9

What does Malachi 1 teach Christians about giving God our best?

Christians are not under Israel's Old Testament sacrificial system, but the spiritual principle remains powerful.

God deserves wholehearted devotion.

We should not deliberately reserve our best for ourselves and offer God only the leftovers.

Romans 12:1 teaches believers to present themselves to God as living sacrifices.

Our entire lives belong to Him.

Question 10

What area of your life are you tempted to give God only the leftovers?

This requires personal examination.

It may involve:

- Prayer.
- Bible reading.
- Worship.
- Ministry.
- Time.
- Giving.
- Family responsibilities.
- Service.
- Obedience.
- Attention.

The question is not merely:

“Am I giving something to God?”

The deeper question is:

“Does what I give demonstrate that I believe He is worthy?”

XXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Malachi 1 calls us to examine our worship.

Ask yourself:

Have I begun questioning God's love because of difficult circumstances?

Have I lost my reverence for God?

Has worship become routine?

Do I give God my best or my leftovers?

Has serving God become something I resent?

Do my actions demonstrate that I believe God is a great King?

These questions should not lead merely to guilt.

They should lead to repentance and renewed worship.

God's purpose in exposing Israel's failure was to call His people back to Himself.

The same God who confronts careless worship invites His people to return to wholehearted devotion.

XXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Quality of Our Worship Reveals the Size of Our View of God”

The priests' deepest problem was not defective animals.

The defective sacrifices were symptoms.

The deeper problem was a defective view of God.

They had forgotten who stood behind the altar.

They had forgotten that God was:

Father.

Master.

Lord of hosts.

Great King.

When our understanding of God's greatness becomes small, our worship often becomes small.

When we see God as He truly is, reverence follows.

Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up.

He responded:

“Woe is me.”

John saw the glorified Christ.

He fell at His feet.

Biblical worship begins when the heart becomes overwhelmed with the greatness, holiness, majesty, grace, and glory of God.

Principle:

We will never rise very high in worship while thinking very little of the One we worship.

XXIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Malachi 1 begins with God's love and ends with God's greatness.

God says:

“I have loved you.”

And later:

“I am a great King.”

Those two truths belong together.

The great King loves His people.

Therefore His people should honor the King who loves them.

Israel had forgotten His love.

The priests had forgotten His greatness.

The result was careless worship.

Malachi calls God's people back.

Remember His love.

Recognize His holiness.

Honor His name.

Give Him your best.

Serve Him with gratitude.

Worship Him with reverence.

Never allow the holy things of God to become ordinary in your heart.

Never offer God something merely because you do not want it yourself.

Never let spiritual service become contemptible.

And never forget the declaration with which this chapter closes:

“I am a great King.”

If He is a great King, then He deserves great honor.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for loving us with a faithful love.

Forgive us for the times we have questioned Your goodness simply because we did not understand our circumstances.

Help us remember Your faithfulness.

Forgive us for careless worship.

Forgive us for giving You the leftovers of our time, energy, attention, and devotion.

Teach us to honor You as our Father.

Teach us to respect You as our Master.

Teach us to worship You as our great King.

Keep our hearts from becoming cold toward sacred things.

Do not allow prayer to become meaningless repetition.

Do not allow Scripture to become ordinary to us.

Do not allow worship to become merely routine.

Do not allow service to become something we despise.

Give us hearts that delight in honoring Your name.

Search us and reveal any area where we are offering You less than wholehearted devotion.

Restore our gratitude.

Renew our reverence.

Deepen our worship.

May Your name be great in our homes, our churches, our communities, and throughout the nations.

May our lives demonstrate that You are worthy of our very best.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “and My name is to be feared among the nations.” — Malachi 1:14

Central Truth

God's love deserves our gratitude, God's holiness deserves our reverence, and God's greatness deserves our wholehearted worship.

Malachi 1 in One Sentence

The great King who faithfully loves His people refuses empty worship and calls them to honor His name by giving Him their sincere and wholehearted devotion.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Malachi Chapter 2 — When Covenant Faithfulness Is Broken

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Malachi Chapter 2 continues God's strong confrontation of Israel's spiritual decline.

Chapter 1 exposed the priests for offering God defective sacrifices and treating His worship with contempt.

Chapter 2 goes deeper.

The problem was not merely what the priests placed upon the altar.

The problem was what had happened within their hearts.

The priests had failed in their sacred calling.

They were supposed to:

- Honor God's name.
- Preserve biblical knowledge.
- Teach God's truth.
- Walk uprightly.
- Turn people away from sin.

Instead, they had corrupted their ministry and caused people to stumble.

But Malachi's message does not stop with spiritual leadership.

The chapter moves from corruption in the priesthood to unfaithfulness among the people and then directly into the covenant of marriage.

Men were betraying the wives they had married in their youth while continuing to bring offerings to God's altar.

They apparently could not understand why God no longer accepted their worship.

God's answer was clear:

You cannot live treacherously toward people while pretending to walk faithfully with God.

Malachi 2 therefore revolves around one major theme:

Covenant faithfulness matters to God.

God takes seriously:

- Faithfulness in ministry.
- Faithfulness to His Word.
- Faithfulness among His people.
- Faithfulness in marriage.
- Faithfulness in our understanding of good and evil.

The chapter ends with Israel questioning God's justice.

They looked at evil people apparently prospering and asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

Malachi's answer will unfold dramatically in Chapter 3.

But before God speaks about coming judgment, He first exposes the unfaithfulness already present among His people.

I. GOD WARNS SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Malachi 2:1 — “This Commandment Is for You”

“And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.”

God speaks directly to the priests.

Their position did not protect them from accountability.

In fact, their leadership increased their responsibility.

Cross References

Leviticus 21:1

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and give them these instructions concerning their responsibilities before Me.”

Deuteronomy 33:10

They will teach Jacob Your judgments and Israel Your law. They will place incense before You and offer whole burnt offerings upon Your altar.

Numbers 3:6

“Bring the tribe of Levi forward and present them before Aaron the priest so they may assist him in the work of the sanctuary.”

The priests had been given a sacred responsibility.

They were not merely religious employees.

They had been entrusted with the worship and instruction of God's people.

Spiritual Principle

Greater spiritual responsibility brings greater spiritual accountability.

Those who teach God's Word must remember that ministry is a stewardship.

Leadership does not place a person above correction.

Leadership places a person under greater responsibility.

Application

Pastors, teachers, elders, ministry leaders, and Christian workers should regularly ask:

Am I faithfully representing the God I claim to serve?

II. REFUSING TO HONOR GOD BRINGS DISCIPLINE

Malachi 2:2 — “Take It to Heart”

“If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart to give glory to My name,” says the Lord of hosts, “then I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not take it to heart.”

God's warning contains two important commands:

Listen.

And:

Take it to heart.

Hearing God's Word is not enough.

Truth must reach the heart and affect the life.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 28:15

But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not carefully obey all His commands and instructions that I am giving you, these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

Leviticus 26:14

But if you will not listen to Me and will not obey all these commands, judgment will come because of your rebellion.

Haggai 1:9

“You expected much, but it turned out to be little. When you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” declares the Lord of hosts. “Because My house lies in ruins while each of you is busy taking care of his own house.”

The priests wanted God's blessings without honoring God's name.

God tells them that even their blessings could become curses.

Key Truth

Blessing cannot be separated from the God who gives the blessing.

It is dangerous to desire God's gifts while refusing to honor the Giver.

Application

Do not merely hear Scripture.

Take it seriously.

Ask:

What does this truth require from me?

III. GOD EXPOSES THE SHAME OF CORRUPT WORSHIP

Malachi 2:3 — A Severe Warning

“Behold, I will rebuke your seed, and I will spread the refuse of your sacrifices on your faces, the very refuse of your solemn feasts, and you will be taken away with it.”

This is intentionally shocking language.

The priests had dishonored God's sacrifices.

God declares that the refuse associated with those sacrifices would become a picture of their humiliation.

What they treated casually would become evidence against them.

Cross References

Leviticus 26:31

I will reduce your cities to ruins and make your holy places desolate. I will no longer take pleasure in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.

Nahum 3:6

I will throw filth upon you and treat you with contempt. I will make you a spectacle for others to see.

Jeremiah 9:22

Say, “This is what the Lord declares: Human bodies will fall like manure scattered across the fields and like grain left behind by the reaper, with no one to gather them.”

The imagery communicates disgrace.

The priests wanted honor from the people while dishonoring God.

God warns that their dishonor would eventually become visible.

Spiritual Principle

Those who refuse to honor God should not expect God to protect their reputation indefinitely.

Character eventually matters more than position.

IV. GOD'S COVENANT WITH LEVI

Malachi 2:4 — The Purpose of God's Warning

“Then you will know that I have sent this command to you, that My covenant with Levi may stand,” says the Lord of hosts.

God's correction had a purpose.

He was not merely condemning priests.

He was defending the sacred nature of the priestly covenant.

Cross References

Numbers 25:12

Therefore tell Phinehas that I am making with him My covenant of peace.

Deuteronomy 33:8

Moses said concerning Levi, “Your sacred instruments belong to Your faithful servant, whom You tested at Massah and challenged at the waters of Meribah.”

Jeremiah 33:21

Then My covenant with David could be broken, so that he would no longer have a descendant reigning upon his throne, and My covenant with the Levitical priests who serve before Me could also be broken.

God's faithfulness had not failed.

The priests had failed.

Important Truth

Human unfaithfulness does not change God's holiness or lower His standards.

When God's servants drift, God's Word remains unchanged.

V. THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER OF FAITHFUL PRIESTHOOD

Malachi 2:5 — Life, Peace, and Reverence

“My covenant was with him—a covenant of life and peace. I gave them to him because he revered Me, and he stood in awe of My name.”

God describes what priestly service was supposed to look like.

The faithful priest lived in reverence.

He stood in awe of God's name.

Cross References

Numbers 25:13

He and his descendants after him will have a lasting covenant of priesthood because he was zealous for his God and acted to make atonement for the Israelites.

Psalms 106:31

His faithful action was counted as righteousness for him from generation to generation forever.

Nehemiah 13:29

Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and violated the covenant of the priests and Levites.

Notice the contrast.

The faithful priest:

Revered God.

The corrupt priest:

Treated God casually.

Spiritual Principle

Effective ministry begins with reverence for God.

Before a servant speaks for God publicly, he must learn to fear God privately.

VI. THE MARKS OF A FAITHFUL SPIRITUAL LEADER

Malachi 2:6 — Truth in His Mouth

“True instruction was in his mouth, and no injustice was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many away from sin.”

This verse gives one of Scripture's clearest descriptions of faithful spiritual ministry.

A Faithful Leader Teaches Truth

“True instruction was in his mouth.”

He did not alter God's message.

A Faithful Leader Speaks Honestly

“No injustice was found on his lips.”

His speech could be trusted.

A Faithful Leader Walks with God

“He walked with Me.”

His ministry was supported by his life.

A Faithful Leader Influences People Toward Holiness

“He turned many away from sin.”

True ministry does not merely make people comfortable.

It helps turn people from sin toward God.

Cross References

Jeremiah 15:19

Therefore the Lord says, “If you return to Me, I will restore you so that you may stand before Me. If you speak what is precious instead of what is worthless, you will be My spokesman. Let the people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.”

Daniel 12:3

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many people toward righteousness will shine like the stars forever.

James 5:20

Remember this: whoever turns a sinner away from the error of his path will help save that person from destruction and will cover many sins.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A preacher's greatest influence comes when biblical truth in his mouth is supported by godly character in his life.

VII. THE PRIEST MUST PRESERVE KNOWLEDGE

Malachi 2:7 — The Messenger of the Lord

“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

The priest had a responsibility to know God's Word.

But knowledge was not merely for himself.

He was supposed to preserve it and communicate it accurately.

Cross References

Leviticus 10:11

You must teach the Israelites all the laws that the Lord has given them through Moses.

Hosea 4:6

My people are being destroyed because they lack knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from serving Me as priests. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also deal with your children.

Haggai 2:11

“This is what the Lord of hosts says: Ask the priests a question concerning the law.”

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual teachers are custodians of truth, not creators of truth.

The preacher does not have authority to invent God's message.

His responsibility is to understand, preserve, explain, and proclaim what God has revealed.

Application for Christian Leaders

A preacher should ask:

Am I teaching what Scripture says—or merely what people want to hear?

VIII. WHEN BAD LEADERSHIP CAUSES OTHERS TO STUMBLE

Malachi 2:8 — “You Have Turned Aside”

“But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your teaching; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the Lord of hosts.

The priests had failed personally.

But their failure did not remain personal.

They caused others to stumble.

Cross References

Hosea 4:9

What happens to the people will also happen to the priests. I will punish them for their ways and repay them for what they have done.

Jeremiah 6:16

This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask where the ancient paths are. Ask where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls.” But they said, “We will not walk in it.”

Ezekiel 44:10

The Levites who went far away from Me when Israel wandered after idols must bear the consequences of their sin.

Spiritual leadership always affects others.

Serious Principle

When teachers distort God's truth, they do not merely harm themselves—they can lead other people away from God.

This is why biblical teaching must never be treated casually.

IX. PARTIALITY CORRUPTS JUSTICE

Malachi 2:9 — Showing Favoritism

“So I have made you despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not kept My ways, but have shown partiality in the law.”

The priests applied God's law differently depending upon the person.

They showed favoritism.

God condemned it.

Cross References

Leviticus 19:15

You must not act unjustly when judging people. Do not show special favor to the poor or favoritism toward the powerful. Judge your neighbor fairly.

Deuteronomy 1:17

Do not show favoritism when judging. Listen equally to the small and the great. Do not be afraid of anyone, because judgment belongs to God.

1 Samuel 2:30

Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, says, “I promised that your family would serve before Me continually. But now the Lord declares: Far be it from Me. Those who honor Me I will honor, but those who despise Me will be treated with contempt.”

Key Truth

Biblical truth must not change according to who is listening.

Truth should be applied fairly.

A church cannot condemn sin in one person while excusing the same sin in another because of popularity, money, influence, friendship, or position.

X. ONE GOD AND ONE COVENANT PEOPLE

Malachi 2:10 — Treachery Among Brothers

“Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then do we deal treacherously with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?”

Malachi moves from the priests to the entire community.

Their relationship with God should have affected their relationships with one another.

Cross References

Isaiah 63:16

You are our Father. Even if Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us, You, Lord, are our Father. Our Redeemer from ancient times is Your name.

Ephesians 4:6

There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, works through all, and is present in all His people.

Genesis 1:27

So God created mankind in His own image. In the image of God He created them. He created male and female.

Spiritual Principle

Our relationship with God should transform the way we treat other people.

It is inconsistent to claim covenant faithfulness toward God while practicing treachery toward others.

XI. JUDAH'S SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE

Malachi 2:11 — Marrying “the Daughter of a Foreign God”

“Judah has acted treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.”

The central issue was not ethnicity.

The issue was spiritual allegiance.

Israelites were entering marriages that connected them with idolatry and foreign gods.

Cross References

Ezra 9:2

They have taken some of the daughters of the surrounding peoples as wives for themselves and their sons. In this way, the holy people have mixed themselves with people devoted to idolatry. The leaders and officials have been among the worst offenders.

Nehemiah 13:23

During that time I also saw Jewish men who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

Deuteronomy 7:3

You must not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

The concern was covenant faithfulness.

The surrounding nations worshiped false gods.

Marriage could therefore become a doorway into idolatry.

Application

The New Testament gives believers a related spiritual principle:

A Christian's most intimate commitments should strengthen faithfulness to God rather than pull the believer away from Him.

XII. RELIGIOUS OFFERINGS CANNOT CANCEL REBELLION

Malachi 2:12 — God Sees the Whole Life

“May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this—whether teacher or student—even though he brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.”

These people continued religious activity while practicing covenant unfaithfulness.

They apparently assumed their offerings would compensate for their disobedience.

God rejected that reasoning.

Cross References

Exodus 12:15

For seven days you must eat bread without yeast. On the first day remove all yeast from your houses. Anyone who eats bread containing yeast during those seven days must be removed from the community of Israel.

Joshua 22:16

“This is what the entire congregation of the Lord asks: Why have you acted so unfaithfully against the God of Israel? Why have you turned away from following the Lord by building an altar in rebellion against Him?”

Ezra 10:8

Anyone who failed to appear within three days, according to the decision of the officials and elders, would have his property taken away and would be removed from the community of the returned exiles.

Spiritual Principle

God cannot be bribed by religious activity.

Offerings do not purchase permission to disobey.

Worship and obedience belong together.

XIII. TEARS AT THE ALTAR

Malachi 2:13 — Worship Without Faithfulness

“And this is another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears, weeping and groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hands.”

The people were emotional.

They cried.

They wept.

They groaned.

Yet God did not accept their offerings.

Why?

Because tears by themselves are not repentance.

Cross References

Isaiah 59:2

Your sins have separated you from your God. Your wrongdoing has caused Him to hide His face from you so that He does not hear.

Genesis 4:5

But God did not look with favor upon Cain and his offering. Cain became extremely angry, and his face fell.

Hebrews 12:17

You know that afterward, when Esau wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought it with tears, he could not reverse what had already been done.

Important Truth

Emotion is not the same as repentance.

A person may cry about consequences while refusing to change the behavior that caused them.

Biblical repentance involves turning.

XIV. GOD IS A WITNESS TO THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Malachi 2:14 — “The Wife of Your Youth”

“And you ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

The men could not understand why God rejected their worship.

God answered:

Because I saw how you treated your wives.

Marriage is described as a **covenant**.

Cross References

Genesis 31:50

If you mistreat my daughters or take other wives besides them, remember that even if no person is present to see it, God is a witness between you and me.

Proverbs 5:18

Let your marriage be blessed, and rejoice in the wife you married when you were young.

Matthew 19:6

Therefore they are no longer two separate lives but one. What God has joined together, people must not tear apart.

Marriage Principle

Marriage is more than a private agreement between two people. God Himself is witness to the covenant.

This gives marriage enormous spiritual significance.

XV. GOD MADE HUSBAND AND WIFE ONE

Malachi 2:15 — Guard Your Spirit

“Has not the Lord made them one? In body and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.”

Marriage was part of God's design from creation.

God's purpose included the establishment of faithful homes in which another generation could be taught to know Him.

Cross References

Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

Matthew 19:5

Jesus said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

Psalms 78:6

Then the next generation would know God's truth, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would teach it to their own children.

Notice God's command:

“Guard yourselves in your spirit.”

Faithfulness requires vigilance.

Spiritual Principle

Marital unfaithfulness often begins internally before it becomes visible externally.

Therefore:

Guard your thoughts.

Guard your affections.

Guard your relationships.

Guard your commitments.

Guard your heart.

XVI. GOD CONDEMNS TREACHERY IN MARRIAGE

Malachi 2:16 — “Do Not Be Unfaithful”

“For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and the one who covers his garment with violence,” says the Lord of hosts. “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be unfaithful.”

The focus of Malachi's warning is covenant betrayal.

Men were treating their wives treacherously.

God saw it.

God condemned it.

Cross References

Matthew 19:8

Jesus told them, “Moses allowed divorce because your hearts were hard. But that was not God's original intention from the beginning.”

Deuteronomy 24:1

If a man marries a woman but later finds something seriously objectionable and decides to divorce her, he must write a certificate of divorce, give it to her, and send her away from his house.

Matthew 5:32

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except because of sexual unfaithfulness exposes the marriage covenant to further violation, and anyone who marries a woman wrongly divorced participates in that brokenness.

Malachi's emphasis is not designed to crush people who have experienced divorce.

The prophetic condemnation is directed particularly toward **treachery, covenant breaking, and unfaithfulness**.

Important Balance

Scripture takes marriage extremely seriously.

It also shows compassion toward people whose lives have been damaged by human sin.

The message is:

Do not treat covenant promises casually.

Application

Faithfulness must be guarded before a crisis develops.

Strong marriages require:

- Loyalty.
- Honesty.
- Forgiveness.
- Communication.
- Purity.
- Sacrifice.
- Prayer.
- Commitment.

XVII. CALLING EVIL GOOD WEARIES THE LORD

Malachi 2:17 — “Where Is the God of Justice?”

“You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ By saying, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the eyes of the Lord, and He is pleased with them,’ or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’”

The chapter ends with another accusation against God.

The people looked at evil and apparently concluded:

God must approve of evil.

Or:

God is not going to judge evil.

Both conclusions were wrong.

Cross References

Isaiah 5:20

How terrible it will be for those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness, and who make bitter things sweet and sweet things bitter.

Isaiah 43:24

You have not honored Me with your offerings. Instead, you have burdened Me with your sins and wearied Me with your wrongdoing.

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look favorably upon wickedness. Why then do You appear silent when treacherous people prosper and when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

Habakkuk struggled with the same question.

But there is an important difference.

Habakkuk brought his confusion to God in faith.

Malachi's audience was accusing God while refusing to recognize its own sin.

Spiritual Principle

God's delayed judgment must never be confused with God's approval of evil.

God is patient.

But He is also just.

His timetable is not ours.

XVIII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM MALACHI 2

1. Spiritual Leaders Must Take God's Word Seriously

The priests were commanded to:

Listen.

Take God's Word to heart.

Give glory to His name.

Their failure affected an entire nation.

Principle:

No ministry position can substitute for personal obedience to God.

2. True Ministry Requires Both Truth and Character

Malachi described the faithful priest:

“True instruction was in his mouth.”

But also:

“He walked with Me.”

Both matter.

Truth without character becomes hypocrisy.

Character without truth becomes sentimentality.

Biblical ministry requires both.

3. Teachers Can Lead People Toward God or Away from God

The priests had:

“Caused many to stumble.”

This demonstrates the enormous responsibility of biblical teaching.

Principle:

Every teacher should ask not merely, “What am I teaching?” but also, “Where is my teaching leading people?”

4. God Takes Covenant Faithfulness Seriously

The word **treachery** dominates the middle of this chapter.

The people were breaking commitments.

God cared deeply because covenant relationships reflect His own faithfulness.

Principle:

Faithfulness matters because God Himself is faithful.

5. Marriage Is Sacred

Marriage is described as a covenant witnessed by God.

Husband and wife become one.

Therefore betrayal within marriage is not merely breaking a human contract.

It violates a covenant made before God.

6. God Is Still the God of Justice

The people asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

The answer begins immediately in Malachi Chapter 3.

God's justice had not disappeared.

Judgment was coming.

Principle:

God's silence should never be mistaken for God's absence.

XIX. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE FAITHFUL AND CORRUPT PRIEST

Malachi 2 presents two pictures.

The Faithful Priest

He reveres God.

He stands in awe of God's name.

Truth is in his mouth.

His words are righteous.

He walks with God.

He turns people from sin.

He preserves knowledge.

People seek biblical instruction from him.

The Corrupt Priest

He refuses to listen.

He does not take God's Word to heart.

He dishonors God's name.

He turns away from God's path.

He corrupts God's covenant.

He causes others to stumble.

He shows partiality.

He brings disgrace upon his ministry.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The difference between faithful ministry and corrupt ministry begins with the leader's relationship with God.

XX. WHAT MALACHI 2 TEACHES ABOUT PREACHERS AND TEACHERS

Malachi 2:6–7 provides an important model for anyone who teaches Scripture.

1. Know the Truth

The priest's lips were supposed to preserve knowledge.

A teacher cannot accurately explain Scripture he has not seriously studied.

2. Speak the Truth

Truth must be communicated faithfully.

The teacher is not called to entertain people with religious opinions.

3. Live the Truth

The faithful priest:

“Walked with Me.”

His private life supported his public teaching.

4. Apply the Truth

The goal was not merely information.

The faithful priest:

“Turned many away from sin.”

5. Remember Whose Message It Is

The priest was:

“The messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

That means the message belongs to God.

Ministry Principle

The pulpit does not belong to the preacher. It belongs to the Word of God.

XXI. THE SPIRITUAL SERIOUSNESS OF MARRIAGE

Malachi gives marriage covenant language.

The wife is described as:

“Your companion.”

And:

“Your wife by covenant.”

Marriage therefore involves:

Companionship

Marriage was designed for intimate partnership.

Covenant

Marriage involves solemn promises of faithfulness.

Oneness

God joins husband and wife in a unique union.

Witness

God sees the covenant.

Generational Influence

God's design includes the spiritual influence of parents upon future generations.

Faithfulness

God repeatedly commands:

“Do not be unfaithful.”

This means marriage must never be treated as disposable.

XXII. GUARD YOUR SPIRIT

One phrase appears twice in this section:

“Guard yourselves in your spirit.”

That deserves attention.

Most major moral failures do not begin with the final outward act.

They develop gradually.

A thought is entertained.

A boundary is weakened.

An affection shifts.

A compromise is justified.

A temptation is entertained.

Eventually an inward drift becomes an outward act.

Therefore Scripture says:

Guard your spirit.

Proverbs 4:23

Guard your heart carefully above everything else, because the direction of your life flows from what is happening within you.

Application

Protect your heart before temptation grows.

Protect your marriage before trouble develops.

Protect your theology before error spreads.

Protect your character before compromise becomes habitual.

Principle:

What you refuse to guard today may become what you struggle to control tomorrow.

XXIII. TEARS WITHOUT REPENTANCE

The people covered God's altar with tears.

Yet God rejected their offerings.

That may seem surprising.

Shouldn't tears demonstrate sincerity?

Not necessarily.

Tears demonstrate emotion.

Repentance demonstrates change.

A person can cry because:

They were caught.

They suffered consequences.

They lost something.

They feel embarrassed.

They fear judgment.

But biblical repentance goes deeper.

Repentance says:

“I was wrong.”

“God is right.”

“I must turn.”

Spiritual Principle

God is not merely looking for sorrow over consequences. He desires a heart willing to turn from sin.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did God hold the priests especially accountable?

Because the priests had been entrusted with spiritual leadership.

They were responsible for preserving knowledge, teaching God's law, leading worship, and helping people understand the ways of God.

Their influence meant that their corruption could spread to others.

Malachi 2:8 says they had actually caused many people to stumble.

Lesson:

Influence increases responsibility.

Question 2

What does it mean to “take it to heart” in Malachi 2:2?

It means more than simply hearing God's warning.

The priests needed to allow God's Word to penetrate their thinking, attitudes, priorities, and behavior.

Biblical truth should produce a response.

Application:

When Scripture confronts us, we should not merely say:

“That is interesting.”

We should ask:

“Lord, what must change in me?”

Question 3

What qualities characterized the faithful priest?

According to Malachi 2:5–7, the faithful priest:

- Revered God.
- Stood in awe of His name.
- Spoke truth.
- Avoided injustice.
- Walked with God.
- Lived uprightly.
- Turned others away from sin.
- Preserved knowledge.
- Taught God's truth.

This is one of the strongest biblical descriptions of faithful spiritual leadership.

Question 4

How did the corrupt priests cause people to stumble?

Their teaching and example led people away from God's path.

When spiritual leaders compromise truth or live hypocritically, people observing them may become confused about what God actually requires.

Therefore teachers must recognize the seriousness of their influence.

Question 5

Why did God condemn partiality in applying the law?

Because God's truth is just.

The priests were apparently applying the law differently depending upon the individual.

God does not authorize leaders to create one standard for influential people and another for ordinary people.

Biblical truth must be applied honestly and fairly.

Question 6

What does Malachi teach about marriage?

Malachi describes marriage as a covenant.

God Himself is presented as a witness to that covenant.

Marriage involves companionship, oneness, faithfulness, and generational responsibility.

This makes marital betrayal spiritually serious.

Question 7

Why were the people's tears and offerings rejected?

Because outward religious expression was being contradicted by covenant unfaithfulness.

They cried at God's altar while refusing to address treachery in their lives.

God wanted more than emotional worship.

He required genuine repentance.

Question 8

What does “guard your spirit” mean?

It means protecting the inner life.

Believers should watch their:

- Thoughts.
- Desires.
- Motivations.
- Affections.
- Relationships.
- Spiritual attitudes.

Because outward unfaithfulness often develops from inward compromise.

Question 9

What should someone who has experienced divorce take from Malachi 2?

The primary warning in this passage concerns treachery and covenant betrayal.

The passage demonstrates how seriously God views marriage.

At the same time, the Bible's larger message includes God's mercy, forgiveness, healing, and restoration for broken people.

Someone whose marriage has ended should not automatically assume he or she is permanently condemned or unusable by God.

Sin should be confessed where sin occurred.

Wrongdoing should be acknowledged where wrongdoing occurred.

But God's grace remains available to repentant people.

Key Truth:

God's high view of marriage and God's abundant grace toward broken people are not enemies.

Both are biblical truths.

Question 10

Why were the people wrong to ask, “Where is the God of justice?”

Their question assumed that because God had not immediately judged evil, He either approved of evil or would never judge it.

That conclusion was false.

God's timing does not eliminate God's justice.

Malachi Chapter 3 will answer their question directly by announcing the coming of the Lord.

Principle:

Delayed judgment is not abandoned judgment.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Malachi 2 forces us to examine several areas of life.

Examine Your Relationship with God's Word

Do you merely hear Scripture?

Or do you take it to heart?

Examine Your Influence

Does your example lead others closer to God or cause them to stumble?

Examine Your Speech

Is truth found in your mouth?

Examine Your Walk

Does your private life agree with your public profession?

Examine Your Relationships

Are you treating people faithfully?

Examine Your Marriage

Are you guarding the covenant God has entrusted to you?

Examine Your Heart

Are there compromises developing inwardly that need to be confronted now?

Examine Your View of Justice

Have you begun believing that because God has not acted yet, He will never act?

Malachi 2 reminds us:

God sees.

God knows.

God cares.

God judges rightly.

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Is Concerned About the Life Behind the Worship”

The people of Malachi's day continued going to the altar.

They brought offerings.

They wept.

They participated in religious ceremonies.

But God looked beyond the altar.

He saw the home.

He saw the marriage.

He saw the corruption.

He saw the favoritism.

He saw the false teaching.

He saw the treachery.

This gives us an essential principle:

God does not separate Sunday worship from Monday living.

The person worshiping in the sanctuary is the same person living at home.

God sees both.

We cannot worship God faithfully while intentionally living treacherously toward others.

Principle:

True worship is supported by a life that seeks to honor the God being worshiped.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Malachi 2 begins with corrupt priests and ends with people questioning God's justice.

Between those two subjects stands one central issue:

Faithfulness.

The priests had been unfaithful to their calling.

The people had been unfaithful to their covenant.

Husbands had been unfaithful to their wives.

Teachers had been unfaithful to God's Word.

And then the people accused God of being unfaithful to justice.

The irony is striking.

Unfaithful people were questioning the faithfulness of God.

Malachi turns the question back upon them.

Before asking:

“Where is the God of justice?”

they needed to ask:

“Where is our faithfulness?”

That question still matters.

Before criticizing God's timing, examine your own obedience.

Before questioning God's justice, remember His holiness.

Before demanding faithfulness from others, examine your own promises.

Before teaching God's Word, make sure you are willing to obey it.

Before standing before people, walk with God.

And before assuming that outward worship is enough, remember:

God sees the heart behind the offering.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for being perfectly faithful even when we are not.

Teach us to take Your Word seriously and to take it to heart.

Give spiritual leaders courage to preserve biblical truth, teach it faithfully, and live lives consistent with what they proclaim.

Protect pastors, teachers, church leaders, and believers from hypocrisy, compromise, favoritism, and spiritual pride.

Let truth be in our mouths and integrity be found in our lives.

Help us walk with You in peace and uprightness.

Use our lives to turn others toward You rather than causing anyone to stumble.

Teach us to honor covenant relationships.

Strengthen marriages.

Restore damaged relationships.

Protect husbands and wives from unfaithfulness.

Help us guard our hearts, our thoughts, our affections, and our spirits.

Where repentance is needed, give us humility to repent.

Where forgiveness is needed, give us grace to forgive.

Where healing is needed, bring restoration according to Your wisdom.

Keep us from offering You outward worship while hiding inward rebellion.

Make our worship sincere.

Make our lives faithful.

And when we struggle to understand why evil appears to prosper, remind us that You remain the God of justice.

Your silence does not mean You are absent.

Your patience does not mean You approve of evil.

Your timing is perfect.

Your judgments are righteous.

Your Word is true.

May we walk faithfully before You until the day when Your perfect justice is fully revealed.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” — Malachi 2:7

Central Truth

God requires faithfulness from those who teach His Word, those who worship His name, and those who enter covenant relationships before Him.

Malachi 2 in One Sentence

The God of covenant faithfulness calls His people to honor Him through truthful teaching, godly living, faithful relationships, sacred marriages, and unwavering trust in His perfect justice.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Malachi Chapter 3 — The Coming Messenger and the Day of Refining

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Malachi Chapter 3 answers the question that ended Chapter 2:

“Where is the God of justice?”

The people had accused God of failing to judge evil.

God's answer was startling.

He essentially says:

“I am coming.”

But before the Lord comes, a messenger will prepare the way.

The New Testament identifies this messenger as **John the Baptist**, who prepared Israel for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Then Malachi speaks of the Lord Himself suddenly coming to His temple.

The chapter therefore contains some of the clearest prophetic language in the Old Testament concerning:

- The forerunner of Christ.
- The coming of the Messiah.
- God's purification of His people.
- God's judgment upon sin.
- God's unchanging character.
- The call to repentance.
- Faithfulness in giving.
- God's remembrance of those who fear Him.
- The final distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

Malachi 3 presents God in several important ways.

He is:

The coming Lord.

The refining fire.

The righteous Judge.

The unchanging God.

The God who calls sinners to return.

The God who provides for His people.

The God who remembers the faithful.

The central message of this chapter is:

God is coming, and His coming will reveal, refine, judge, restore, and distinguish those who truly belong to Him.

I. THE MESSENGER WILL PREPARE THE WAY

Malachi 3:1 — “I Am Sending My Messenger”

“Behold, I am sending My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight—behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.

This is one of the most important Messianic prophecies in Malachi.

Two figures appear in this verse.

First:

“My messenger.”

This messenger prepares the way.

Second:

“The Lord whom you seek.”

He comes suddenly to His temple.

The New Testament clearly applies the first messenger to **John the Baptist**.

John's ministry was to prepare people for Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 11:10

Jesus said, “John is the one Scripture was speaking about when God said, ‘Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You. He will prepare the way before You.’”

Mark 1:2

As it is written in the prophets: “Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, and he will prepare Your way.”

Luke 7:27

Jesus said, “John is the one about whom Scripture says, ‘I am sending My messenger ahead of You, and he will prepare the way before You.’”

John the Baptist did not come to draw attention to himself.

He came to point people toward Christ.

John 1:29

When John saw Jesus coming toward him, he declared:

“Look! Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Spiritual Principle

A faithful messenger prepares people to encounter Christ rather than drawing attention to himself.

John understood his role.

He said concerning Jesus:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

That remains an important principle for Christian ministry.

II. THE LORD WILL COME TO HIS TEMPLE

Malachi says:

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.”

This points beyond John the Baptist to Christ.

Jesus entered the temple during His earthly ministry.

He also confronted corruption within it.

Matthew 21:12–13

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. He told them, “Scripture says, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

The Lord came to His temple.

But His coming was not merely comforting.

It was also confronting.

Key Truth

The presence of God comforts the faithful but exposes corruption.

The people asked for God's justice.

But they had not considered what would happen when the God of justice examined them.

III. WHO CAN STAND WHEN HE APPEARS?

Malachi 3:2 — The Refiner's Fire

“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 the launderer’s soap.”

The question is not:

Will He come?

The question is:

Who will be able to stand when He comes?

God's holiness exposes human sin.

Malachi uses two pictures.

A Refiner's Fire

A refiner used intense heat to separate impurities from precious metal.

Launderer's Soap

Strong cleansing agents were used to remove deep stains from clothing.

Both images communicate purification.

Cross References

Isaiah 40:3

A voice cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness. Make a straight road in the desert for our God."

Joel 2:11

The Lord raises His voice before His army. His forces are very great, and those who carry out His command are powerful. The day of the Lord is great and terrible. Who can endure it?

Zechariah 13:9

I will bring this remaining group through the fire. I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are My people," and they will say, "The Lord is our God."

Spiritual Principle

God's holiness does not merely expose impurity; He also works to remove it.

God does not refine His people because He hates them.

He refines them because He is making them holy.

IV. THE REFINER SITS OVER THE SILVER

Malachi 3:3 — Purifying the Sons of Levi

"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present offerings to the Lord in righteousness."

The priests had corrupted worship.

God promised purification.

Notice the picture:

"He will sit as a refiner."

The refining process is deliberate.

The refiner knows what he is doing.

The heat is not random.

The purpose is purification.

Cross References

Isaiah 48:10

Look, I have refined you, though not in the same way silver is refined. I have tested you in the furnace of suffering.

1 Peter 1:7

These trials test the genuineness of your faith. Your faith is more valuable than gold, which eventually perishes even though it is tested by fire. Genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Psalms 66:10

You have tested us, O God. You have refined us as silver is refined.

Spiritual Principle

God may use difficult circumstances as part of His refining work.

The purpose is not meaningless suffering.

God can use trials to expose:

- Pride.
- Self-reliance.
- Wrong priorities.
- Hidden sin.
- False motives.
- Weak faith.

And through those trials He can produce:

- Endurance.
- Humility.
- Dependence.
- Holiness.
- Spiritual maturity.

Key Truth

The Refiner controls the fire.

V. WORSHIP RESTORED

Malachi 3:4 — Offerings Pleasing to God

“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in days of old and in former years.”

Earlier God rejected their offerings.

Why?

Because their hearts and lives were corrupt.

But purification changes worship.

Once the people are restored, their offerings become pleasing again.

Cross References

Isaiah 1:26

I will restore your judges as they were at first and your counselors as they were in the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness and the Faithful City.

Amos 5:24

Instead, let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a never-ending stream.

Jeremiah 33:11

Once again people will hear voices of joy and gladness, the voices of bridegroom and bride, and the voices of those bringing thanksgiving offerings into the house of the Lord and saying, “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, because the Lord is good and His faithful love lasts forever.”

Spiritual Principle

God desires worship that comes from lives being transformed by Him.

True worship is not merely music, ceremony, or religious activity.

It comes from hearts being purified.

VI. GOD WILL DRAW NEAR FOR JUDGMENT

Malachi 3:5 — The Swift Witness

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, against those who defraud workers of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, who deprive foreigners of justice, and those who do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts.

The people asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

God answers:

“I will draw near to you for judgment.”

Notice the sins God identifies.

Sorcery

Turning toward occult practices instead of God.

Adultery

Breaking the marriage covenant.

Perjury

Speaking falsely under oath.

Defrauding Workers

Withholding wages from people who earned them.

Oppressing Widows and Orphans

Taking advantage of vulnerable people.

Denying Justice to Foreigners

Treating outsiders unfairly.

Failing to Fear God

At the root of these sins was a lack of reverence.

Cross References

Exodus 22:22

You must not mistreat a widow or an orphan.

Deuteronomy 24:14

You must not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that person is one of your fellow Israelites or a foreigner living in your land.

James 5:4

Look! The wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying out against you. The cries of those workers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Spiritual Principle

God cares about both personal morality and social justice.

Biblical righteousness affects:

- Marriage.
- Business.
- Speech.
- Worship.
- Treatment of workers.
- Treatment of the vulnerable.
- Treatment of strangers.

True spirituality cannot be separated from righteous conduct.

VII. THE LORD DOES NOT CHANGE

Malachi 3:6 — The Unchanging God

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

This is one of the great statements about God's immutability.

God does not change in His essential character.

He remains:

- Holy.
- Just.
- Loving.
- Faithful.
- True.
- Merciful.
- Righteous.

Cross References

Numbers 23:19

God is not a man who lies or a human being who changes His mind like sinful people do. When He speaks, He acts. When He promises something, He fulfills it.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father who created the heavenly lights. He does not change like shifting shadows.

Lamentations 3:22

Because of the Lord's faithful love we are not destroyed, because His mercies never come to an end.

Why had Israel not been destroyed?

Because God remained faithful to His covenant promises.

Key Truth

Israel's survival depended more upon God's faithfulness than Israel's faithfulness.

They changed.

God did not.

They wandered.

God remained faithful.

They broke covenant responsibilities.

God remained true to His character.

VIII. RETURN TO GOD

Malachi 3:7 — “Return to Me”

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?”

God confronts their history of rebellion.

But judgment is not the only message.

God extends an invitation:

“Return to Me.”

This is the language of repentance.

Cross References

Zechariah 1:3

Tell the people, “This is what the Lord of hosts says: Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

James 4:8

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you who are divided in your loyalty.

Jeremiah 3:22

“Return, you unfaithful children, and I will heal your unfaithfulness.” The people reply, “Yes, we are coming to You because You are the Lord our God.”

Spiritual Principle

God's call to repentance is also an invitation to restoration.

God does not merely say:

“You have wandered.”

He says:

“Come back.”

IX. CAN A PERSON ROB GOD?

Malachi 3:8 — Tithes and Offerings

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.”

The people were shocked by the accusation.

“How have we robbed You?”

God answers plainly.

They had withheld what belonged to Him under the covenant.

Cross References

Leviticus 27:30

One tenth of everything produced by the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord. It is holy to the Lord.

Nehemiah 13:10

I also learned that the Levites had not been receiving the portions assigned to them. Because of this, the Levites and singers who were responsible for the worship had returned to their own fields to support themselves.

Deuteronomy 14:22

Each year you must set aside one tenth of everything your fields produce.

Under the Mosaic covenant, the tithe supported worship, the Levites, and the religious life of Israel. Their withholding revealed deeper spiritual disobedience.

Spiritual Principle

Our use of material resources reveals something about our spiritual priorities.

Giving is ultimately a matter of worship.

X. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WITHHOLDING

Malachi 3:9 — “You Are Cursed with a Curse”

“You are cursed with a curse, for you, the whole nation, are robbing Me.”

Israel was experiencing covenant consequences.

The whole nation had participated in withholding what God required.

Cross References

Haggai 1:6

You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never seem satisfied. You drink but never have enough. You put on clothes but remain cold. You earn wages, but it is like putting money into a bag full of holes.

Deuteronomy 28:22

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, fever, inflammation, scorching heat, drought, blight, and mildew. These troubles will pursue you until you perish.

Deuteronomy 28:38

You will plant much seed in your fields but harvest little because locusts will consume the crop.

Their economic problems were connected to covenant disobedience.

Important Context

Malachi was speaking specifically to Israel under the Mosaic covenant.

The passage should not be reduced to the idea that every financial hardship today is caused by insufficient giving.

Nor should it be turned into a guarantee that anyone who gives money will become wealthy.

The larger principle is:

God calls His people to trust Him and honor Him with what He has entrusted to them.

XI. BRING THE FULL TITHE

Malachi 3:10 — “Test Me in This”

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house. Test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “and see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to contain it.”

This is one of the best-known verses in Malachi.

God challenges Israel to obey Him fully.

Not part of the tithe.

The **full tithe**.

The Storehouse

The storehouse was connected with the temple system and was used to hold provisions dedicated to God.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 9:6

Remember this: the person who plants only a little will harvest only a little, but the person who plants generously will also harvest generously.

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. A generous measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. The standard you use in dealing with others will also be used in dealing with you.

Proverbs 3:9

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first and best part of everything you produce.

Spiritual Principle

Giving is an expression of trust.

It says:

“God is my provider.”

Important New Testament Application

Christians should not treat Malachi 3:10 as a formula for getting rich.

New Testament giving emphasizes:

- Willingness.
- Generosity.
- Cheerfulness.
- Sacrifice.
- Faith.
- Stewardship.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not unwillingly or because he feels forced, because God loves a cheerful giver.

XII. GOD PROMISES TO PROTECT THE HARVEST

Malachi 3:11 — Rebuking the Devourer

“I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruits of your soil, nor shall your vine cast its fruit in the field before its time,” says the Lord of hosts.

Agriculture was central to Israel's economy.

Crop failure could devastate families and communities.

God promised covenant protection when Israel returned to faithful obedience.

Cross References

Joel 2:25

“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust have eaten—the great army I sent among you.”

Deuteronomy 28:4

Blessed will be the children born to you, the crops of your land, and the young produced by your livestock, including your cattle and flocks.

Habakkuk 3:17

Even if the fig tree does not blossom, there is no fruit on the vines, the olive crop fails, the fields produce no food, the sheep disappear from the pen, and there are no cattle in the stalls—

Habakkuk continues by declaring that he will still rejoice in God.

That provides an important balance.

Key Truth

Faith trusts God not merely because of what He gives, but because of who He is.

XIII. THE NATIONS WILL RECOGNIZE GOD'S BLESSING

Malachi 3:12 — “You Will Be a Delightful Land”

“And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the Lord of hosts.

Israel's restoration would become visible.

Other nations would recognize God's blessing.

Cross References

Isaiah 62:4

You will no longer be called Forsaken, and your land will no longer be called Desolate. Instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land will be called Married, because the Lord delights in you.

Psalms 67:2

May Your way be known throughout the earth and Your saving power among all nations.

Zechariah 8:13

Just as you were once considered a curse among the nations, O people of Judah and Israel, so I will save you, and you will become a blessing. Do not be afraid. Let your hands be strong.

Spiritual Principle

God's blessing upon His people should ultimately display God's goodness rather than merely increase human comfort.

XIV. HARSH WORDS AGAINST GOD

Malachi 3:13 — “What Have We Spoken Against You?”

“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the Lord. Yet you say, “What have we spoken against You?”

Again the people appear unaware of their spiritual condition.

Throughout Malachi they repeatedly ask:

“How?”

They could not see their own rebellion.

Cross References

Isaiah 29:13

The Lord says, “These people come near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. Their worship is based only upon human rules they have learned.”

Jude 1:15

The Lord will execute judgment upon everyone and convict ungodly people for all the evil things they have done and for all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Psalm 12:3

May the Lord silence every flattering tongue and every mouth that speaks proudly.

Spiritual Principle

Our words reveal what is happening in our hearts.

Complaining against God's character is spiritually serious.

XV. “IT IS USELESS TO SERVE GOD”

Malachi 3:14 — The Cynicism of Unbelief

“You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His requirements, or that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?’”

Their relationship with God had become transactional.

They asked:

“What do we get out of serving God?”

This reveals a serious misunderstanding.

God is worthy of obedience whether or not obedience produces immediate earthly advantage.

Cross References

Job 21:15

The wicked ask, “Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? What benefit would we gain by praying to Him?”

Psalm 73:13

I thought, “Surely I have kept my heart pure for nothing and washed my hands in innocence for no reason.”

Isaiah 58:3

The people ask, “Why have we fasted if You do not notice? Why have we humbled ourselves if You do not pay attention?” God answers, “On the very day of your fasting you continue seeking your own pleasure and mistreating your workers.”

Spiritual Principle

Serving God is not a business arrangement designed to guarantee immediate earthly profit.

We serve God because:

He is God.

He is worthy.

He redeemed us.

He loves us.

He is holy.

He is Lord.

XVI. WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

Malachi 3:15 — The Prosperity of the Arrogant

“Now we call the arrogant blessed; evildoers prosper, and those who test God escape.”

The people looked around and saw wicked people apparently succeeding.

This created spiritual confusion.

The same question appears throughout Scripture.

Cross References

Psalms 73:3

I became jealous of arrogant people when I saw how the wicked seemed to prosper.

Jeremiah 12:1

Lord, You are always righteous when I bring my case before You. Still, I want to ask You about Your justice: Why does the way of wicked people prosper? Why do those who act treacherously live comfortably?

Job 21:7

Why do wicked people continue living, grow old, and become powerful?

Scripture does not pretend wicked people never prosper temporarily.

Sometimes they do.

The question is whether temporary prosperity equals final victory.

It does not.

Key Truth

Never judge eternity by a temporary snapshot.

Psalm 73 eventually concludes that the prosperity of the wicked is temporary.

God sees the end.

XVII. THE FAITHFUL SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER

Malachi 3:16 — The Book of Remembrance

“Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord listened and heard them. A book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the Lord and honored His name.”

This verse provides a beautiful contrast.

Some people spoke against God.

Others spoke **about God** in reverence.

God listened.

Notice Three Things

They Feared the Lord

They possessed genuine reverence.

They Spoke with One Another

Faithful believers encouraged one another.

God Heard Them

Their conversations mattered to God.

Cross References

Exodus 32:32

Moses said, “But now, please forgive their sin. If You will not forgive them, then erase my name from the book You have written.”

Revelation 20:12

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God. Books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Psalms 56:8

You keep track of all my wandering. You have collected my tears in Your bottle. Are they not recorded in Your book?

The phrase **“book of remembrance”** communicates that God does not forget His faithful people.

God does not literally need written notes in order to remember.

The image communicates divine recognition.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness that goes unnoticed by people never goes unnoticed by God.

XVIII. “THEY SHALL BE MINE”

Malachi 3:17 — God's Treasured Possession

“They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “in the day when I make up My treasured possession. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

These are some of the most comforting words in Malachi.

God looks upon those who fear Him and declares:

“They shall be Mine.”

Cross References

Exodus 19:5

Now therefore, if you faithfully listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession among all peoples, because the whole earth belongs to Me.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging especially to God, so that you may proclaim the greatness of the One who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Psalms 103:13

Just as a father has compassion upon his children, so the Lord has compassion upon those who fear Him.

Key Truth

The greatest blessing is not merely receiving something from God. It is belonging to God.

God says:

“They are Mine.”

XIX. GOD WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE CLEAR

Malachi 3:18 — The Righteous and the Wicked

“Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not.”

The people had complained that evil people seemed to prosper.

God says a day is coming when the difference will become unmistakable.

Cross References

Ezekiel 18:20

The person who sins is the one who will die. A son will not bear the guilt of his father, and a father will not bear the guilt of his son. The righteousness of the righteous person will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will fall upon him.

Psalms 1:6

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

Matthew 13:49

Jesus said, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.”

Spiritual Principle

There may not always appear to be a visible difference today, but God's final judgment will reveal the difference completely.

XX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM MALACHI 3

1. God Keeps His Promises

God promised:

“I am sending My messenger.”

Centuries later, John the Baptist appeared preparing the way for Christ.

Principle:

God's promises may appear delayed, but they are never forgotten.

2. Christ Is Both Savior and Refiner

Many people desire a Messiah who comforts.

Malachi also presents a Messiah who purifies.

Principle:

Jesus did not come merely to make sinners comfortable. He came to save and transform them.

3. God's Refining Work Has a Purpose

The refiner's fire removes impurity.

Trials can become tools in God's hands.

Principle:

God can use what hurts us to produce holiness within us.

4. God Cares About Justice

Malachi 3:5 shows that God sees:

- Exploited workers.
- Oppressed widows.
- Vulnerable orphans.
- Mistreated foreigners.

- Broken marriages.
- Dishonest speech.
- Occult rebellion.

Principle:

Biblical holiness includes how we treat other people.

5. God Does Not Change

Malachi 3:6 is foundational.

“I, the Lord, do not change.”

Principle:

Our confidence rests upon the unchanging character of God.

Circumstances change.

Cultures change.

Governments change.

Feelings change.

People change.

God does not.

6. God Calls His People to Return

God's message is:

“Return to Me.”

Principle:

No amount of wandering changes the proper direction of repentance: back toward God.

7. God Remembers the Faithful

When others mocked faithfulness, those who feared God spoke together.

God heard them.

Principle:

Heaven notices what earth overlooks.

XXI. THE MESSENGER AND THE MESSIAH

Malachi 3:1 contains an important prophetic progression.

First Comes the Messenger

John the Baptist prepares the way.

His message was repentance.

Then Comes the Lord

Jesus Christ appears.

John points toward Him.

Then Comes Purification

The Messiah exposes sin and calls people to holiness.

Then Comes Judgment

Ultimately the Lord will judge evil completely.

This means Christ's coming cannot be reduced to only one dimension.

Jesus is:

Savior.

Lord.

King.

Refiner.

Judge.

XXII. THE REFINER'S FIRE

The image of refining deserves deeper consideration.

When precious metal was refined, heat brought impurities to the surface.

The impurities could then be removed.

God sometimes allows circumstances that expose things hidden within us.

Pressure may expose:

- Anger.
- Fear.
- Pride.
- Jealousy.
- Selfishness.
- Unbelief.
- Dependence upon possessions.
- Dependence upon people instead of God.

We may think the trial created those problems.

Often the trial merely revealed what was already present.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God sometimes uses the heat of circumstances to reveal impurities of the heart so that His transforming grace can remove them.

XXIII. “RETURN TO ME”

Perhaps the most gracious statement in the chapter is:

“Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Israel had wandered for generations.

Yet God still called them back.

This reveals God's heart.

God's correction is not merely punitive.

It is restorative.

Repentance Involves Recognition

I have wandered.

Repentance Involves Confession

I have sinned.

Repentance Involves Turning

I am returning to God.

Repentance Involves Faith

God receives those who genuinely return to Him.

Key Truth

The distance created by rebellion can begin to close with one movement of repentance toward God.

XXIV. WHAT MALACHI 3 TEACHES ABOUT GIVING

Malachi 3:8–10 is frequently discussed in relation to tithing.

The immediate historical context concerns Israel under the Mosaic covenant.

God had commanded Israel to bring tithes into His storehouse.

They were withholding them.

God called this robbery.

For Christians today, New Testament giving emphasizes several important principles.

Giving Should Be Willing

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give what he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or because of pressure.

Giving Should Be Cheerful

God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving Should Be Generous

2 Corinthians 9:6

Whoever plants generously will also harvest generously.

Giving Should Honor God

Proverbs 3:9

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first and best portion of what you receive.

Giving Should Reflect Trust

The believer recognizes:

Everything ultimately belongs to God.

Important Truth

Biblical giving is not a scheme for purchasing God's blessings. It is an act of worship, stewardship, generosity, and trust.

XXV. WHEN SERVING GOD SEEMS USELESS

Malachi's people said:

“It is vain to serve God.”

Sometimes believers may feel similarly.

You pray.

Nothing seems to change.

You remain faithful.

Others appear to prosper through compromise.

You obey God.

Someone dishonest appears to get ahead.

You serve faithfully.

Nobody seems to notice.

Malachi 3 gives the answer.

God Sees

God Hears

God Remembers

God Knows Who Belongs to Him

God Will Ultimately Make the Difference Clear

Therefore:

Never measure the value of faithfulness only by immediate results.

Eternity changes the calculation.

XXVI. THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Malachi 3:16 gives us one of Scripture's most encouraging pictures.

Those who feared God spoke together.

God listened.

A book of remembrance was written.

The imagery communicates a profound truth:

God never overlooks genuine faithfulness.

People may forget your service.

God does not.

People may overlook your prayers.

God does not.

People may fail to appreciate your sacrifice.

God does not.

People may never recognize your obedience.

God does.

Hebrews 6:10

God is not unjust. He will not forget your work and the love you have shown toward His name by serving His people and continuing to serve them.

Spiritual Principle

You do not need human applause when you know heaven remembers.

XXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who is the messenger in Malachi 3:1?

The New Testament identifies the messenger who prepares the way as **John the Baptist**.

Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27 apply the prophecy to John.

John's mission was to prepare Israel spiritually for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Question 2

Who is the “Messenger of the covenant”?

The passage points to the coming Lord, understood in Christian interpretation as Jesus Christ.

The first messenger prepares the way.

Then the Lord Himself comes.

This makes Malachi 3:1 an important Messianic prophecy.

Question 3

What does the refiner's fire symbolize?

It symbolizes purification.

Just as intense heat removes impurities from precious metal, God works to remove spiritual impurity from His people.

Trials, discipline, conviction, and God's Word can all function as instruments through which God exposes and corrects what is wrong.

Question 4

Why does Malachi ask, “Who can stand when He appears?”

Because God's holiness exposes human sin.

People may casually ask for divine judgment until they realize that the Judge examines everyone.

The proper response to God's holiness is humility and repentance.

Question 5

What sins does God condemn in Malachi 3:5?

God identifies:

- Sorcery.
- Adultery.
- Perjury.
- Withholding workers' wages.
- Oppressing widows.
- Oppressing orphans.
- Denying justice to foreigners.
- Refusing to fear God.

This demonstrates that God cares about both spiritual devotion and ethical conduct.

Question 6

What does Malachi 3:6 mean when God says, “I do not change”?

It means God's essential character remains constant.

God does not become less holy, less truthful, less faithful, or less righteous.

His unchanging nature provides stability for faith.

Israel had not been destroyed because God's covenant faithfulness remained.

Question 7

What does “Return to Me, and I will return to you” teach about repentance?

It demonstrates that God invites wandering people to return.

Repentance means turning away from rebellion and turning back toward God.

God does not merely expose sin.

He calls sinners toward restoration.

Question 8

Does Malachi 3:10 promise that everyone who gives money will become rich?

No.

The immediate promise was given to covenant Israel concerning obedience to the Mosaic system of tithes and agricultural blessings.

Christians should not interpret the verse as a guaranteed formula for becoming wealthy.

The broader biblical principle remains:

God's people should honor Him through faithful, generous, trusting stewardship.

Question 9

What does the book of remembrance mean?

It symbolizes God's perfect remembrance of those who fear Him and honor His name.

God does not literally need a book to prevent Himself from forgetting.

The picture emphasizes that faithful devotion is seen, valued, and remembered by God.

Question 10

Why did some people believe serving God was useless?

They compared themselves with arrogant and wicked people who appeared to prosper.

Because they focused only upon immediate circumstances, they concluded that righteousness produced no benefit.

Their mistake was evaluating God's justice before God's work was complete.

Question 11

What should believers do when wicked people appear to prosper?

They should remember that temporary prosperity is not the same as eternal blessing.

Psalm 73 demonstrates this principle.

The wicked may prosper for a season.

But God sees the end.

The believer should remain faithful rather than measuring righteousness by short-term results.

Question 12

What does Malachi 3:18 teach about final judgment?

God will ultimately reveal the difference between:

The righteous and the wicked.

Those who serve Him and those who do not.

Present circumstances may sometimes blur that distinction.

God's final judgment will make it perfectly clear.

XXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Malachi 3 asks us several important questions.

Am I Prepared to Meet the Lord?

John prepared people for Christ through a message of repentance.

Preparation begins with the heart.

What Is God Refining in Me?

Are difficulties exposing something God wants to change?

Do I Trust God's Unchanging Character?

When circumstances change, am I anchored in the God who does not?

Is There an Area Where I Need to Return?

God still calls:

“Return to Me.”

Does My Giving Reflect Trust?

Do I treat everything I possess as ultimately belonging to God?

Have I Become Discouraged Because Evil Appears to Prosper?

Remember:

The story is not finished.

Do I Encourage Other Believers?

Those who feared God:

“Spoke with one another.”

Faithful believers need faithful fellowship.

Am I Living for Human Recognition or God's Approval?

God remembers what people overlook.

XXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God May Seem Silent, but He Is Never Absent”

The people asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

God responded:

“I am coming.”

Some said:

“It is useless to serve God.”

God responded by recording the names of those who feared Him.

Some said:

“The arrogant are blessed.”

God responded:

“You will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.”

The lesson is powerful.

God's apparent silence should never be interpreted as God's absence.

He sees.

He hears.

He remembers.

He refines.

He judges.

He restores.

And at the proper time:

He acts.

XXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Malachi Chapter 3 begins with a coming messenger and ends with a coming distinction.

The messenger prepares the way.

The Lord comes.

The Refiner purifies.

The Judge exposes evil.

The unchanging God calls His people home.

The Provider challenges His people to trust Him.

The faithful speak together.

God listens.

God remembers.

God claims them as His treasured possession.

And finally, God reveals the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not.

This chapter therefore calls us to live with eternity in view.

Do not become discouraged because wickedness appears successful.

Do not assume that God has forgotten your faithfulness.

Do not believe God's silence means He is inactive.

Do not resist His refining work.

Do not refuse His invitation to return.

Do not worship material blessings instead of the God who provides them.

Do not seek merely to appear faithful before people.

Live before God.

Because the Lord who promised to come:

came.

And the Lord who promised final judgment:

will come again.

The great question of Malachi 3 therefore becomes personal:

Are you ready to stand before Him?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You are the God who keeps every promise.

Thank You for sending John the Baptist to prepare the way and for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Prepare our hearts to walk faithfully before You.

Refine us.

Remove the impurities that hinder our fellowship with You.

When trials expose pride, unbelief, selfishness, fear, or hidden sin, give us humility to surrender those things to You.

Teach us to trust the Refiner even when we do not understand the fire.

Thank You that You do not change.

When everything around us feels uncertain, remind us that Your character remains perfectly faithful.

When we wander, call us back.

Give us hearts willing to hear Your invitation:

“Return to Me.”

Teach us to honor You with everything You have placed in our hands.

Make us faithful stewards.

Keep us from loving money more than we love You.

Protect us from believing that material prosperity is the measure of spiritual blessing.

When wicked people appear to prosper, keep us from becoming discouraged.

Remind us that You see the end from the beginning.

Help us remain faithful even when faithfulness receives no earthly applause.

Thank You that You hear the conversations of those who fear You.

Thank You that You remember every act of genuine faithfulness.

Thank You for the beautiful promise:

“They shall be Mine.”

May we live as people who belong completely to You.

And prepare us for the day when You reveal the final distinction between those who serve You and those who do not.

May our lives honor Your name until Jesus Christ returns.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” — Malachi 3:6

Central Truth

The unchanging God sends His Messiah, refines His people, judges evil, calls sinners to return, remembers the faithful, and will ultimately reveal the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not.

Malachi 3 in One Sentence

The coming Lord calls His people to repentance and faithful worship while assuring them that He sees, remembers, refines, provides, judges righteously, and will one day make His perfect justice visible to all.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Malachi Chapter 4 — The Great Day of the Lord

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Malachi Chapter 4 brings the Old Testament prophetic message to a dramatic conclusion.

The chapter is short—only six verses—but its message is enormous.

Malachi looks forward to:

- The coming Day of the Lord.
- God's judgment upon the wicked.
- The vindication of those who fear His name.
- The rising of the Sun of Righteousness.
- The continuing authority of God's Word.
- The coming of a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah.
- A ministry of repentance and reconciliation.
- The preparation of God's people for the coming Messiah.

Malachi 3 ended by saying that God would make a clear distinction between:

The righteous and the wicked.

The one who serves God and the one who does not.

Malachi 4 explains what that distinction will ultimately look like.

For the proud and wicked, the Day of the Lord will be a day of judgment.

For those who fear God's name, it will be a day of healing, freedom, joy, and victory.

The chapter therefore presents two completely different outcomes.

One group faces the fire.

The other experiences the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

One group is reduced to stubble.

The other goes out with joy like calves released from confinement.

The difference is not accidental.

It is connected to the fundamental question raised throughout Malachi:

Will people fear the Lord and honor His name, or will they continue in rebellion?

The final words of Malachi also create an important bridge to the New Testament.

God promises:

“I will send you Elijah the prophet.”

The New Testament explains that John the Baptist came in the **spirit and power of Elijah**, preparing people for Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament therefore closes looking forward.

Judgment is coming.

A messenger is coming.

The Messiah is coming.

And God's people must be ready.

I. THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING

Malachi 4:1 — The Day Burning Like an Oven

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the proud and all who do wickedly will be stubble. The coming day shall set them ablaze,” says the Lord of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

Malachi begins with certainty:

“The day is coming.”

God's judgment may appear delayed.

But it is not cancelled.

The people had complained that wicked people prospered.

God now tells them that their prosperity will not last forever.

The Proud

Throughout Scripture, pride represents independence from God.

The proud person says:

“I do not need God.”

Those Who Do Wickedly

These are people whose lives are characterized by rebellion against God's ways.

Malachi compares them to:

Stubble.

Stubble is the dry material remaining after a harvest.

It burns quickly when exposed to fire.

Cross References

Joel 2:31

The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and fearful Day of the Lord arrives.

Obadiah 1:18

The descendants of Jacob will be like a fire, and the descendants of Joseph like a flame, while the descendants of Esau will be like dry stubble. They will burn them and consume them, and no survivor will remain from the house of Esau, because the Lord has spoken.

2 Peter 3:10

The Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly like a thief. The heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements will be destroyed by intense heat, and the earth and everything done upon it will be exposed before God.

Spiritual Principle

God's patience should never be interpreted as God's approval of sin.

Judgment delayed is not judgment abandoned.

Key Truth

The wicked may appear secure today, but no rebellion against God can survive His final judgment.

II. THE DAY OF THE LORD HAS TWO SIDES

The Day of the Lord is not presented the same way for everyone.

For the wicked:

Fire.

For those who fear God:

Healing.

For the rebellious:

Judgment.

For the faithful:

Vindication.

This demonstrates an important biblical truth.

The Same God Is Both Judge and Savior

God's holiness brings terror to unrepentant rebellion.

But that same holiness brings hope to those who trust Him.

Spiritual Principle

Our relationship with God determines whether His coming is something we fear or something we welcome.

III. THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL RISE

Malachi 4:2 — Healing in His Wings

“But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. You shall go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”

The word **“but”** introduces a powerful contrast.

Verse 1 describes judgment.

Verse 2 describes hope.

The promise is specifically directed toward:

“You who fear My name.”

These are the faithful people described in Malachi 3:16.

They reverence God.

They honor His name.

They remain faithful even when others say serving God is useless.

The Sun of Righteousness

The imagery is beautiful.

After darkness comes sunrise.

After suffering comes healing.

After waiting comes deliverance.

The phrase “**Sun of Righteousness**” has traditionally been understood by many Christians as pointing toward the Messiah and His saving work.

The imagery certainly fits the New Testament presentation of Christ as the One who brings spiritual light.

Cross References

Luke 1:78

Because of the tender mercy of our God, the rising light from heaven will come to visit us.

Isaiah 60:1

Rise up and shine, because your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Psalms 84:11

The Lord God is our sun and our shield. The Lord gives grace and honor, and He does not withhold what is truly good from those who walk uprightly.

Spiritual Principle

God's final word for those who fear Him is not darkness but light.

The night does not last forever.

The Sun rises.

IV. HEALING IN HIS WINGS

The expression:

“Healing in His wings”

uses imagery connected with the rays of the rising sun spreading across the horizon.

The picture is of righteousness bringing restoration.

God's kingdom ultimately brings healing to what sin has broken.

Sin produces:

- Separation.
- Brokenness.
- Death.
- Conflict.
- Fear.
- Pain.

God's redemptive work brings:

- Reconciliation.
- Restoration.
- Life.
- Peace.
- Joy.
- Wholeness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What sin has wounded, God's redemptive power is able to restore.

V. JOY LIKE CALVES RELEASED FROM THE STALL

Malachi says:

“You shall go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”

This is a picture of freedom and joy.

An animal confined inside a stall suddenly released into an open field runs and leaps.

The picture communicates:

Freedom.

Energy.

Joy.

Release.

Those who remained faithful to God would eventually discover that their faithfulness had not been wasted.

Spiritual Principle

The end of faithfulness is not regret—it is joy.

There may be seasons when obedience feels difficult.

But God's ultimate purpose for His people is not bondage.

It is freedom in His presence.

VI. THE WICKED WILL NOT WIN FOREVER

Malachi 4:3 — Ashes Under Their Feet

“And you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the Lord of hosts.

The wicked had apparently looked powerful.

Malachi 3:15 said:

“Evildoers prosper.”

But Malachi 4:3 shows the final outcome.

The wicked will not remain victorious.

God says:

“On the day when I act.”

That phrase is important.

Human beings often become discouraged because God does not act according to their timetable.

But Scripture repeatedly teaches that there is an appointed time when God will act decisively.

Cross References

Psalms 91:13

You will walk over the lion and the poisonous snake. You will trample the young lion and the serpent beneath your feet.

Romans 16:20

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Micah 7:10

My enemy will see what God has done and will be covered with shame. She once said to me, “Where is the Lord your God?” But I will see her defeat, and she will be trampled down like mud in the streets.

Key Truth

Evil may win temporary battles, but it will not win the final war.

God has appointed a day when righteousness will prevail.

VII. “ON THE DAY WHEN I ACT”

One phrase in Malachi 4:3 deserves special attention:

“On the day when I act.”

Throughout Scripture, God's people often wait.

Abraham waited.

Joseph waited.

Moses waited.

David waited.

Israel waited.

The disciples waited.

The church waits.

Waiting can create questions.

Why has God not acted?

Why does evil continue?

Why does injustice remain?

Malachi reminds us:

God has not forgotten.

There is a day:

“When I act.”

Spiritual Principle

God's delay is not God's defeat.

He acts according to His perfect wisdom and timing.

VIII. REMEMBER THE LAW OF MOSES

Malachi 4:4 — God's Word During the Waiting

“Remember the law of My servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.”

As Malachi approaches the end of his prophecy, God directs Israel back to Scripture.

They were waiting for future events.

But while waiting, they already knew what they were supposed to do.

Remember God's Word.

This is extremely important.

Prophecy should never distract God's people from obedience.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 4:10

Remember the day when you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb. The Lord told Moses, “Gather the people before Me so they may hear My words, learn to fear Me throughout their lives, and teach these things to their children.”

Joshua 1:8

Keep this Book of the Law continually upon your lips. Think carefully about it day and night so that you may obey everything written in it. Then you will walk wisely and faithfully in the path God has given you.

John 1:17

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

While waiting for God to fulfill tomorrow's promises, obey the Word He has already given today.

IX. REMEMBERING MEANS MORE THAN RECALLING

When God says:

“Remember the law.”

He means more than:

“Think about it occasionally.”

Biblical remembrance involves responding to what God has said.

Israel was to:

Know God's commands.

Teach God's commands.

Obey God's commands.

Pass God's truth to the next generation.

Application

Believers should not merely own Bibles.

We should:

Read Scripture.

Study Scripture.

Understand Scripture.

Believe Scripture.

Obey Scripture.

Teach Scripture.

Live Scripture.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Word of God was never given merely to fill the mind; it was given to direct the life.

X. GOD PROMISES TO SEND ELIJAH

Malachi 4:5 — Before the Great and Dreadful Day

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

The final prophecy of Malachi introduces Elijah.

This prophecy created expectation among the Jewish people that Elijah would appear before the Messiah.

The New Testament helps explain its fulfillment.

John the Baptist came with a ministry resembling Elijah.

He called people to repentance.

He confronted sin courageously.

He prepared people for the coming Lord.

Cross References

Matthew 17:11

Jesus answered, “Elijah truly comes and will restore all things.”

Mark 9:12

Jesus told them, “Elijah does come first and prepares things for restoration. But Scripture also says that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected.”

Luke 1:17

John will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers toward their children and turn disobedient people toward the wisdom of the righteous. In this way he will prepare a people ready for the Lord.

Luke gives the clearest explanation.

John was not literally Elijah returned from the dead.

He came:

“In the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Spiritual Principle

God prepares people before major moments of divine revelation.

John prepared people for Christ by preaching repentance.

XI. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND ELIJAH

There are several similarities between Elijah and John the Baptist.

Both Confronted Sin

Elijah confronted King Ahab.

John confronted Herod.

Both Called People Back to God

Elijah cried:

“How long will you hesitate between two opinions?”

John cried:

“Repent.”

Both Lived Simply

Neither man's ministry depended upon luxury.

Both Spoke Courageously

They were willing to proclaim truth even when powerful people opposed them.

Both Prepared People for God's Work

Elijah called Israel back to covenant faithfulness.

John prepared Israel for the Messiah.

Ministry Principle

A true messenger does not adjust God's message to avoid offending powerful people.

XII. TURNING HEARTS

Malachi 4:6 — Fathers and Children

“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse.”

The final verse of the Old Testament speaks about hearts being turned.

This is the language of repentance and reconciliation.

When people turn toward God, relationships are affected.

The vertical relationship with God changes horizontal relationships with others.

Cross References

1 Kings 18:37

“Answer me, Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that You, Lord, are God and that You are turning their hearts back to You.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today. I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

Luke 1:16

John will turn many of the people of Israel back to the Lord their God.

Spiritual Principle

True revival turns hearts toward God and also transforms relationships between people.

Repentance should affect:

- Families.
 - Marriages.
 - Parenting.
 - Friendships.
 - Churches.
 - Communities.
-

XIII. THE HEART OF THE FATHER AND THE HEART OF THE CHILD

Malachi specifically mentions:

Fathers.

And:

Children.

God cares about generations.

The faith of one generation should be passed to another.

But sin can create distance between generations.

Repentance can help restore what sin has damaged.

Psalms 78:5–7

God established His testimony in Jacob and commanded the fathers to teach His truth to their children so future generations would know it and place their confidence in God.

Spiritual Principle

One of the marks of spiritual renewal is renewed concern for the next generation.

Parents should ask:

Am I merely providing materially for my children, or am I helping them know God?

Churches should ask:

Are we faithfully passing biblical truth to those coming behind us?

XIV. THE OLD TESTAMENT ENDS WITH A WARNING

Malachi ends with the word:

“Curse.”

That is sobering.

Sin brought a curse into God's creation.

Rebellion brings judgment.

The Old Testament closes with humanity still needing:

A Savior.

A Redeemer.

A King.

A perfect Priest.

A final sacrifice.

The final verse therefore creates anticipation.

Something more is needed.

Someone is coming.

And then the New Testament begins.

Matthew 1:1

This is the record of the family line of Jesus Christ, the Son of David and the Son of Abraham.

The Old Testament ends looking for the Messiah.

The New Testament announces:

He has come.

XV. THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Malachi closes with the promise of a coming messenger.

Then the New Testament opens with John the Baptist appearing in the wilderness.

Malachi Says:

“I will send you Elijah.”

Luke Says:

John came:

“In the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Malachi Says:

The messenger will prepare people.

John Says:

“Prepare the way of the Lord.”

Malachi Says:

The Lord will come.

John Says:

“Look! The Lamb of God.”

The connection is unmistakable.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Old Testament ends with expectation, and the New Testament begins with fulfillment.

XVI. THE FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SILENCE

After Malachi, there was no new Old Testament prophetic book for several centuries.

This period is commonly called the **intertestamental period**.

From the human perspective, heaven seemed silent.

But God had not stopped working.

Empires changed.

Political boundaries changed.

Languages spread.

Road systems developed.

Historical conditions moved toward the world into which Jesus would be born.

Then, at the appointed time, John the Baptist appeared.

Galatians 4:4

But when the right time had fully arrived, God sent His Son, born of a woman and born under the law.

Spiritual Principle

God's silence does not mean God's inactivity.

Even when no new revelation seemed to come, God's providence continued moving history toward Christ.

XVII. CHRIST AS THE LIGHT

The image:

“Sun of Righteousness”

naturally connects with the New Testament theme of Christ as light.

John 8:12

Jesus said:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light that gives life.”

John 1:4–5

Life was in Him, and that life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Spiritual Principle

Christ brings light into spiritual darkness.

Where sin creates confusion, Christ reveals truth.

Where guilt creates despair, Christ provides forgiveness.

Where death creates fear, Christ gives eternal life.

XVIII. THE DAY OF THE LORD

The phrase “**Day of the Lord**” appears throughout Scripture.

It describes decisive divine intervention when God judges evil and establishes His righteous purposes.

Different prophetic passages may emphasize different aspects of this theme.

Malachi focuses on two.

Judgment

The wicked are compared to stubble consumed by fire.

Vindication

Those who fear God experience healing, joy, and victory.

Key Truth

History is moving toward God's appointed conclusion.

Human history is not wandering without purpose.

God has established an end toward which everything moves.

XIX. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM MALACHI 4

1. Judgment Is Certain

God says:

“The day is coming.”

Not:

“The day might come.”

Principle:

God's warnings should be taken seriously because God's judgment is certain.

2. God Will Vindicate Those Who Fear Him

The faithful may sometimes feel forgotten.

Malachi says the opposite.

The Sun of Righteousness will rise.

Principle:

Faithfulness that appears costly today will not be regretted in eternity.

3. God's Word Must Guide Us While We Wait

Israel was told:

“Remember the law of Moses.”

Principle:

Prophecy should produce obedience, not speculation without holiness.

4. Repentance Prepares People for God

John's ministry would prepare the way.

His primary message was repentance.

Principle:

Preparation for encountering God begins with a heart willing to turn from sin.

5. Revival Affects Relationships

The hearts of fathers and children would be turned toward one another.

Principle:

A genuine return to God should produce greater faithfulness toward people.

6. The Old Testament Points Forward to Christ

Malachi closes with expectation.

The New Testament opens with fulfillment.

Principle:

The Bible tells one unfolding story centered upon God's redemptive work fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

XX. MALACHI'S FINAL CONTRASTS

The book ends with several powerful contrasts.

Proud or God-Fearing

The proud are judged.

Those who fear God's name are healed.

Stubble or Treasured Possession

The wicked become stubble.

The faithful belong to God.

Fire or Sunrise

The wicked face consuming judgment.

The righteous see the Sun of Righteousness rise.

Rebellion or Repentance

One path continues away from God.

The other turns back.

Curse or Blessing

The final choice has consequences.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Malachi leaves no room for spiritual neutrality.

Every person must ultimately stand in relationship either to God's grace or God's judgment.

XXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What is the Day of the Lord in Malachi 4?

It is a coming time of decisive divine judgment and vindication.

For the wicked, it is pictured as burning fire.

For those who fear God, it brings healing and joy.

The passage therefore emphasizes that God will finally expose the difference between those who serve Him and those who reject Him.

Question 2

Why are the wicked compared to stubble?

Stubble is dry and easily burned.

The picture emphasizes how powerless human rebellion becomes when confronted by God's judgment.

People may appear powerful in the present world, but no human strength can stand against God's final judgment.

Question 3

Who is the Sun of Righteousness?

In its immediate prophetic imagery, the phrase describes righteousness and healing rising upon those who fear God.

Christian interpretation has traditionally connected this imagery with Jesus Christ because the New Testament repeatedly presents Christ as the light who brings salvation.

Luke 1:78 describes the coming Messiah in imagery of a rising light from heaven.

Question 4

What does “healing in His wings” mean?

It pictures God's saving and restoring work.

Just as rays of sunlight spread across the earth, God's righteousness brings restoration where sin has produced brokenness.

The emphasis is upon divine healing, renewal, and deliverance.

Question 5

Why does God tell Israel to remember Moses?

Because Israel already possessed God's revealed Word.

While waiting for future prophetic fulfillment, they were responsible to obey what God had already revealed.

This teaches us that waiting for God's future work should never become an excuse for neglecting present obedience.

Question 6

Was John the Baptist literally Elijah?

No.

John himself was not Elijah returned to earth.

Luke 1:17 explains that John came:

“In the spirit and power of Elijah.”

His ministry resembled Elijah's because he confronted sin, called people to repentance, and prepared the way for God's work.

Question 7

Why did Jesus connect John the Baptist with Elijah?

Because John fulfilled the preparatory role described by Malachi.

He came before Christ.

He called Israel to repentance.

He prepared people to receive the Messiah.

His ministry fulfilled the Elijah-like function Malachi had foretold.

Question 8

What does turning the hearts of fathers to children mean?

It speaks of reconciliation accompanying spiritual restoration.

When people genuinely turn toward God, their relationships should also change.

Repentance affects families.

Faithfulness to God should encourage faithfulness between generations.

Question 9

Why does Malachi end with a warning about a curse?

The warning emphasizes the seriousness of refusing God's call to repentance.

The Old Testament closes with humanity still facing the consequences of sin and still needing God's promised Redeemer.

This prepares the reader for the coming of Christ in the New Testament.

Question 10

What should believers do while waiting for Christ's return?

Malachi provides a helpful pattern.

Fear God's name.

Remember His Word.

Live faithfully.

Turn away from sin.

Strengthen relationships.

Trust God's justice.

Remain prepared.

Key Principle:

Biblical prophecy should produce faithful living.

XXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Malachi 4 asks several serious questions.

Do I Fear God's Name?

Not merely:

Do I believe God exists?

But:

Do I live with reverence toward Him?

Am I Ready for the Day of the Lord?

God's judgment is certain.

Am I living in repentance and faith?

Am I Walking in the Light?

The Sun of Righteousness has risen.

Am I following Christ or continuing in spiritual darkness?

Am I Remembering God's Word?

Is Scripture shaping my thinking and behavior?

Is My Heart Being Turned?

Am I becoming more faithful toward God and others?

Am I Helping the Next Generation Know God?

Faith must be passed forward.

Am I Waiting Faithfully?

God may seem silent.

But He is not absent.

XXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God's Silence Is Never the End of the Story”

Malachi spoke.

Then prophetic revelation became quiet for generations.

From Israel's perspective, it might have appeared that nothing was happening.

But God's promise remained.

A messenger was coming.

The Lord was coming.

Then one day a voice cried out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord.”

John appeared.

Then Jesus appeared.

God had not forgotten.

God had not changed His plan.

God had not abandoned His promises.

He had been preparing everything according to His perfect timing.

Principle:

When God appears silent, keep obeying the last thing He clearly told you in His Word.

His promises have not expired.

XXIV. MALACHI AND THE MESSAGE OF THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT

Malachi provides a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament.

The Old Testament began with creation.

Then came:

Sin.

Judgment.

Promise.

Covenant.

Sacrifice.

Priesthood.

Kings.

Prophets.

Exile.

Restoration.

Expectation.

But something remained unresolved.

Sin still existed.

Death still existed.

Israel still needed redemption.

The nations still needed salvation.

A perfect King had not yet appeared.

A final sacrifice had not yet been offered.

Then Malachi ends by telling Israel:

Prepare.

Someone is coming.

The New Testament begins by identifying Him:

Jesus Christ.

XXV. FROM MALACHI TO MATTHEW

The final pages of the Old Testament and the opening pages of the New Testament fit together beautifully.

Malachi Promises a Messenger

Matthew introduces John the Baptist.

Malachi Promises the Lord's Coming

Matthew announces Jesus Christ.

Malachi Calls for Repentance

John preaches:

“Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Malachi Speaks of Judgment

John warns of coming judgment.

Malachi Speaks of Restoration

Jesus comes bringing salvation.

Key Truth

The New Testament does not begin a different story. It announces the fulfillment of the story God had already been telling.

XXVI. THE OLD TESTAMENT'S FINAL EXPECTATION

The final chapter of the Old Testament tells us to look forward.

Look for:

The messenger.

Look for:

The Lord.

Look for:

The day.

Look for:

The restoration.

Look for:

The King.

Then the New Testament opens and says:

The King has come.

John 20:31

These things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life through His name.

This is the fulfillment toward which the Old Testament points.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Malachi began with God saying:

“I have loved you.”

Malachi ends with God warning of the coming Day of the Lord.

Love and holiness stand together.

God loves His people.

Therefore He calls them to repentance.

God is holy.

Therefore He will judge sin.

God is faithful.

Therefore His promises will be fulfilled.

God is merciful.

Therefore He sends a messenger before judgment.

God is gracious.

Therefore He offers restoration.

And God is sovereign.

Therefore history is moving toward His appointed conclusion.

The message of Malachi is not:

“Try harder to become religious.”

The message is:

Return to God.

Honor His name.

Give Him your best.

Walk faithfully.

Keep your covenant commitments.

Trust His justice.

Remember His Word.

Prepare your heart.

And look for the coming Lord.

For the wicked, His coming means judgment.

For those who fear His name, it means sunrise.

Healing.

Freedom.

Joy.

Vindication.

The Old Testament closes with anticipation.

And the New Testament opens with the answer:

Jesus Christ has come.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the message of Malachi.

Thank You that You are holy, righteous, faithful, merciful, and true.

Help us never forget that a day is coming when every person will stand before You.

Give us hearts that genuinely fear Your name.

Keep us from pride, rebellion, hypocrisy, and spiritual indifference.

Thank You for the promise of the Sun of Righteousness.

Thank You for sending Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, to bring salvation to those living in spiritual darkness.

Bring healing to the broken places in our lives.

Bring light into our darkness.

Bring freedom where sin has created bondage.

Teach us to remember Your Word.

Do not allow us to become distracted by speculation about the future while neglecting obedience in the present.

Help us read Your Word, believe Your Word, obey Your Word, and teach Your Word to the next generation.

Turn our hearts toward You.

Turn fathers toward their children.

Turn children toward their fathers.

Restore damaged relationships.

Strengthen families.

Renew churches.

Awaken those who have become spiritually cold.

Give us courage like Elijah.

Give us faithfulness like John the Baptist.

Help us speak truth clearly and prepare others to encounter Jesus Christ.

When You appear silent, keep us faithful.

When evil appears strong, remind us that its victory is temporary.

When obedience becomes difficult, remind us that the Sun will rise.

May we live every day prepared for the return of Jesus Christ.

And may our lives proclaim:

The Lord is coming.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. You shall go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” — Malachi 4:2

Central Truth

The coming Day of the Lord will bring judgment upon unrepentant wickedness, but healing, freedom, vindication, and joy to those who fear God's name and await His promised Messiah.

Malachi 4 in One Sentence

The Old Testament closes by calling God's people to remember His Word, turn their hearts back to Him, prepare for the promised messenger, and confidently await the coming Lord who will judge evil and bring healing to those who fear His name.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI IN ONE SENTENCE

The God who says, “I have loved you,” calls His covenant people away from careless worship, corrupt leadership, broken promises, spiritual cynicism, and unfaithfulness so they may return to Him, honor His name, and prepare for the coming Messiah and the great Day of the Lord.

FINAL MESSAGE OF MALACHI

God loves His people.

God deserves their best.

God requires faithfulness.

God does not change.

God calls sinners to return.

God remembers those who fear Him.

God will judge evil.

God will vindicate the righteous.

The messenger will come.

The Messiah will come.

Therefore—prepare the way of the Lord.

Epilogue

The final words of Malachi do not allow the reader to remain neutral.

The prophet has spoken of God's love.

He has confronted corrupt worship.

He has rebuked unfaithful priests.

He has exposed broken covenants.

He has challenged those who questioned God's justice.

He has called the people to return.

He has promised a coming Messenger.

He has described the Lord as a Refiner.

He has warned of a coming day of judgment.

And he has promised that the Sun of Righteousness will rise upon those who fear the name of the Lord.

Then the prophetic voice falls silent.

For centuries, Israel would wait.

No new prophet would rise with a fresh word from God.

No new book of Scripture would be added.

The people would live between promise and fulfillment.

They would remember the words of Moses.

They would preserve the writings of the prophets.

They would look for the coming Messenger.

They would wait for the day when the Lord would visit His people.

And then, after the long silence, a voice would be heard in the wilderness.

"Prepare the way of the Lord."

The promise of Malachi had begun to unfold.

John the Baptist appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah, calling people to repentance and preparing them for the coming of Christ.

Then Jesus came.

The Lord entered His temple.

The Messiah proclaimed the kingdom.

The One anticipated by the prophets stood among His people.
Malachi had pointed forward, and the New Testament revealed the fulfillment.
Yet not every promise in Malachi has reached its final completion.
The Day of the Lord is still ahead.
The final judgment of wickedness has not yet taken place.
The complete vindication of the righteous still awaits the return of Christ.
The world still groans under sin.
Pride still rises.
Injustice still exists.
False worship still deceives.
Religious hypocrisy still flourishes.
Many still ask, "Where is the God of justice?"
The answer of Malachi remains the same.
He is coming.
God has not forgotten.
God has not changed.
God is not indifferent.
The apparent delay of judgment is not the absence of judgment.
The Lord will deal with sin.
The Lord will vindicate His people.
The Lord will keep every promise.
That truth gives Malachi lasting power.
The book is not only about ancient Israel.
It is about the human heart.
The questions Malachi asked are still being asked.
"Wherein have You loved us?"
"How have we despised Your name?"
"How have we polluted You?"
"Why?"
"Where is the God of justice?"

“How shall we return?”

“How have we robbed You?”

“What have we spoken against You?”

These questions reveal something important.

People can drift far from God without realizing how far they have gone.

That is one of the great dangers of spiritual decline.

It is often gradual.

Rarely does a heart become cold in a single moment.

It happens through neglect.

Prayer becomes less important.

Scripture becomes less central.

Worship becomes routine.

Conviction becomes easier to dismiss.

Compromise becomes easier to justify.

The things of God lose their urgency.

Soon a person may still possess the language of faith while losing the passion of faith.

Malachi speaks directly into that condition.

Return to Me.

That call is not complicated.

It is not hidden.

It is not reserved for a spiritual elite.

It is the gracious invitation of God to those who have wandered.

Return.

Return in worship.

Return in obedience.

Return in faithfulness.

Return in giving.

Return in marriage.

Return in reverence.

Return in trust.

Return in repentance.

Return with the whole heart.

And with that call comes a promise.

“I will return to you.”

That promise reveals the mercy of God.

He is not reluctant to receive the repentant.

He is not searching for reasons to reject those who sincerely turn back to Him.

He calls because He desires restoration.

He disciplines because He loves.

He exposes sin because He intends to heal the broken relationship between Himself and His people.

The refining fire of Malachi is therefore not merely an image of destruction.

It is also an image of purification.

A refiner heats precious metal so that impurities rise and can be removed.

The process is intense because the purpose is valuable.

God desires a purified people.

He desires worship that is sincere.

Leadership that is faithful.

Homes that honor Him.

Lives that reflect His holiness.

He desires a people who fear His name and speak often of Him.

Malachi gives special attention to such people.

While others complained that serving God was useless, there were some who feared the Lord.

They spoke to one another.

The Lord listened.

A book of remembrance was written.

God called them His treasured possession.

What a remarkable contrast.

The world may overlook faithfulness.

God does not.

Others may fail to notice quiet obedience.

God sees it.

The sacrifices of the faithful may never receive public recognition.

God remembers.

No prayer offered in reverence is insignificant to Him.

No act of obedience is wasted.

No stand for righteousness is forgotten.

No faithful servant is invisible to God.

That truth should encourage every believer who has ever wondered whether faithfulness matters.

It matters.

The Lord sees.

The Lord remembers.

The Lord distinguishes between those who serve Him and those who do not.

And one day, that distinction will be made visible.

Malachi ends by looking toward that day.

For the wicked, it will be a day of judgment.

For those who fear the Lord, it will be a day of hope.

The Sun of Righteousness will rise.

Darkness will not have the final word.

Sin will not have the final word.

Injustice will not have the final word.

Death will not have the final word.

God will.

That is why the final message of Malachi is not despair.

It is expectation.

The same God who spoke through the prophet is still faithful.

The same Lord who came the first time will come again.

The same Savior who offers mercy today will one day judge the world in righteousness.

Until that day, the message remains urgent.

Remember.

Return.

Revere.

Remain faithful.

Wait for the Lord.

As we close this verse-by-verse study, the greatest question is not whether we have understood every historical detail or prophetic connection.

The greatest question is whether the message has reached our hearts.

Has Malachi exposed anything in us that needs to change?

Has our worship become routine?

Have we given God less than our best?

Have we allowed discouragement to weaken faithfulness?

Have we questioned God because His timing did not match our expectations?

Have we treated lightly what He calls holy?

Have we become more concerned with outward religion than inward devotion?

If so, the invitation still stands.

Return to Me.

That is not merely the title of this commentary.

It is the call of the book.

It is the call of the prophet.

It is the call of God.

And for every person who sincerely responds, there is hope.

The Father receives the returning heart.

The Refiner cleanses.

The Lord restores.

The faithful are remembered.

The righteous are vindicated.

And the coming King will establish His kingdom.

Malachi closes the Old Testament with the world still waiting.

But we now know the name of the One for whom they waited.

Jesus Christ.

He came as the promised Messiah.

He gave His life for sinners.
He rose from the dead.
He reigns at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again.
Until that day, may the prayer of every believer be simple:
Lord, keep my heart close to You.
Keep my worship sincere.
Keep my faith strong.
Keep my life faithful.
And whenever I begin to wander,
draw me back.
Return to Me.
That is where renewal begins.
That is where fellowship is restored.
And that is where every faithful life must remain.

Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

The book of Malachi has always struck me as one of the most direct and searching books in the Old Testament.

It is only four chapters long, yet within those chapters God confronts nearly every area of spiritual life: worship, leadership, marriage, giving, obedience, justice, repentance, and preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Malachi was written to people who had not completely abandoned God.

That is what makes the book so powerful.

The people still had the temple.

They still had priests.

They still brought sacrifices.

They still participated in religious life.

Yet their hearts had grown distant.

Their worship had become careless.

Their obedience had become selective.

Their faithfulness had weakened.

Some had even begun to question whether serving God was worth it.

That spiritual condition is not confined to ancient Israel.

It can happen in any generation.

It can happen in churches.

It can happen in families.

It can happen in the life of an individual believer.

We can continue doing religious things while slowly losing our reverence for the One we claim to worship.

We can know the language of faith without maintaining the devotion of faith.

We can become familiar with Scripture while becoming less responsive to what it says.

That is why the central words of Malachi are so important:

“Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Those words gave this book its title.

They also express my purpose in writing it.

My desire is not simply to provide information about Malachi.

I want this commentary to help readers hear the voice of God through Malachi.

Verse by verse, I have tried to explain the historical setting, clarify the meaning of the text, connect important biblical themes, and show how the message applies to believers today.

But explanation alone is not enough.

The Word of God is meant to reach the heart.

Malachi challenges us to examine the quality of our worship.

It asks whether we are giving God our best or merely what is convenient.

It calls spiritual leaders to faithfulness.

It reminds husbands and wives that covenant commitments matter.

It confronts dishonesty and selfishness.

It warns against spiritual cynicism.

It teaches us that God sees the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not.

It reminds us that God does not change.

It tells us that He remembers those who fear His name.

And it points us toward the coming Lord.

One of the great themes of Malachi is that God is both holy and gracious.

He does not ignore sin.

He exposes it.

He rebukes it.

He judges it.

Yet at the same time, He calls the sinner to return.

That is grace.

The God who confronts His people is also the God who invites them back.

The God who speaks of refining fire is also the God who promises healing.

The God who warns of judgment is also the God who remembers His faithful people as His treasured possession.

Ultimately, Malachi points us toward Jesus Christ.

The promised Messenger would come.

The Lord would visit His people.

The way would be prepared.

The long prophetic silence would eventually be broken.

John the Baptist would appear.

Then Christ would come.

For that reason, Malachi does not merely close the Old Testament.

It prepares us for the New Testament.

It leaves us looking forward.

As you read this commentary, I encourage you to do more than study.

Pray.

Reflect.

Examine your heart.

Ask the Lord to show you areas where worship has become routine, obedience has weakened, or devotion has grown cold.

And when He does, respond to the invitation that stands at the heart of this book:

Return.

Return to prayer.

Return to Scripture.

Return to worship.

Return to obedience.

Return to reverence.

Return to faithfulness.

Return to Christ.

My prayer is that *Return to Me* will not merely increase your knowledge of Malachi, but deepen your walk with God.

May it help you understand the text more clearly.

May it strengthen your confidence in God's unchanging character.

May it renew your reverence for His holiness.

May it remind you that faithfulness is never wasted.

And may it prepare your heart for the coming of the Lord.

Thank you for allowing me to walk with you through this remarkable prophetic book.

May the Lord use these pages for His glory and for your spiritual growth.

Dr. Paul Crawford

A Closing Prayer

"Father, I thank You for every reader who has walked through these pages. For the one who does not yet know You, I pray they would hear Your voice and receive Your Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. For the one who already believes, I pray You would set their heart ablaze with urgency—to speak, to share, to love, and to never be silent. May we all live as faithful watchmen, sounding the trumpet until the day You call us home. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen."

THE BIBLE WAY TO HEAVEN

1. Admit you are a sinner.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to Heaven on his own merit.

No matter how much good we do, we still come short.

2. Realize the penalty for sin.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

Just as there are wages for good, there is punishment for wrong.

The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a place called Hell.

3. Believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for you.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

4. Trust Christ alone as your Saviour.

"...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23b)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Eternal life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus and offered freely to those who call upon Him by faith.

Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. Being saved is a one-time event.

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.

RETURN TO ME

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary
on the Book of Malachi

Malachi is the final prophetic voice of the Old Testament, confronting cold worship, compromised priests, broken covenant faithfulness, and a people who had drifted far from the Lord. Yet within its stern rebukes shines a gracious call: 'Return to Me, and I will return to you.'

In this verse-by-verse commentary, Dr. Paul Crawford walks carefully through every passage of Malachi, explaining its historical setting, uncovering its doctrinal depth, and applying its timeless truths to the church today.

From the corruption of worship to the promise of the coming Messenger, this volume reveals how Malachi still speaks with power to believers who need renewed reverence, repentance, and hope.

Clear, faithful, and pastorally rich, *Return to Me* will help readers understand the final message of the Old Testament and prepare their hearts for the coming King.

Dr. Paul Crawford

