

MALACHI

Historical Context

The name for this book comes from a word that means “my messenger.” In English translations, this word has been capitalized as if it were a name, and it may be (Malachi 1:1). The same word is found in Malachi 3:1, where it is translated as “my messenger” in the phrase “I will send my messenger.” To capitalize and transliterate in 1:1 but not in 3:1 was the translator’s decision. In other words, the book may have been about a nameless messenger.¹ Notice how 3 Nephi 24:1 would read if the name were translated: “And it came to pass that he commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto [my messenger], which he should tell unto them. . . . Thus said the Father unto [my messenger]—Behold, I will send *my messenger*, and he shall prepare the way before me” (emphasis added).

The book of Malachi is believed to have been written after the temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt, after the Babylonian exile. The messenger speaks against the polluted altar and the profane sacrifices in chapter 1, implying that the temple practices were active. The tithe mentioned in chapter 3 was certainly the temple tax for the Levites (Leviticus 27:30–32; Numbers 18:21). In this primitive understanding of the Mosaic temple, there are glimpses of the restoration of temple keys in the present dispensation.²

¹ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve Micah–Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 991.

² Malachi 3:1; 4:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.

Malachi 1

1:1–5

The word for “burden” (also in Zechariah 9:1; 12:1) should be translated as “oracle” or “pronouncement.”³ The Lord began by pronouncing His love for the people. In response, the people expressed doubt as a child would (Malachi 1:2). With Israel’s history in mind, the people may have incorrectly interpreted their trials as proof of the Lord’s lack of love. The Lord’s response is informative and contingent upon a covenantal relationship. In ancient texts, the concepts of love and hate reflect covenantal terminology.⁴ The Lord’s proof to the people that He did love them was to remind them that He had made a covenant with Jacob, not with Esau.⁵ Covenants are made in love, and their stipulations are bound by love. “If ye love me, keep my commandment” (John 14:15).

Edom was the land of Esau,⁶ and the Edomites had ransacked Jerusalem after the Babylonian siege (see commentary on the book of Obadiah).

1:6–11

Priests were consecrated to be the teachers of Israel (Malachi 2:7), but they had not honored or respected the Lord as a father or master. Their actions were not pure. Although they were serving in the temple according to their duties, they had defiled the altar and the table of shewbread by bringing offerings with blemishes, blind and lame.⁷ They had forgotten the reason for the sacrifices and how they are symbols of the Atonement. The outward rituals of sacrifice should point to and be accompanied by the pure love Christ: “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2; see Moroni 7:47). The calling to be a priest did not make them righteous. Because of this apostasy, the “heathen” (the Gentiles) would receive the blessings of the gospel (Romans 1:16). Paul experienced this during his ministry: “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

Verse 9 indirectly contains a doctrine unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord Jehovah is clearly the speaker in this verse (“saith the Lord”). However, Jehovah spoke of another deity (perhaps the Father) and clarified that He is not speaking about Himself by also referring to Himself as a

3 This may imply that the three passages (two in Zechariah and one in Malachi) were originally one text.

4 Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Samuel Say the Lord ‘Hated’ the Lamanites? (Helaman 15:4),” *KnoWhy* 186 (September 13, 2016), <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-samuel-say-the-lord-hated-the-lamanites>. See Hosea 9:15; Luke 14:26.

5 Genesis 28:13–15. Compare to Jacob’s stronger relationship with Rachel, then with Leah (Genesis 29:30–31).

6 Genesis 25:30; 32:3; 36:1.

7 Malachi 1:7–8, 10; see Exodus 28:43; 39:36.

recipient of this God’s graciousness. It reads, “I [Jehovah] pray you, beseech *God* that *he* will be gracious unto *us* [Jehovah and the people]” (emphasis added). In other words, Jehovah could not ask the people to beseech Himself as God because He also says that this God (the Father) “will be gracious” unto Him and the people (“us”). Jehovah was explicitly distinguishing Himself from the God who would be gracious to Him and the people. This and other passages teach the doctrine of the Godhead—that Jehovah is the son of God the Father, unlike in conventional Christian theology.⁸

1:12–14

Although the people were participating in corruption, they were also complaining about the quality of the sacrifices, calling them polluted and contemptible. They were acting as if they were not at fault. They were retaining their animals without blemish, but they offered the torn, the lame, and the sick unto God. The Lord would later tell Moroni that He makes weakness strong if the people seek righteousness (Ether 12:27–28). The priests who Malachi was addressing were doing the opposite. They were putting forth their weak things unto the Lord and withholding the strong animals for themselves. These mediocre sacrifices lead up to the message on tithing in chapter 3.

Malachi 2

2:1–10

The Lord was angry with the priests of Israel. They were taking lightly their responsibility and the priesthood they held. They were only blessing themselves with their priestly privileges. However, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). While some of the language in verse 3 may sound harsh today, it revolves around the ancient and Mosaic worldview. Their “seed” (offspring) would apostatize, meaning they would lose their blessings, and they would be rendered ritually impure, having dung spread across their faces. To be ritually impure meant they could not participate or exercise their priesthood in the temple. They were already unworthy because of their behavior but continued to offer sacrifices in the temple. By making them visibly and ritualistically impure (with dung on their faces), they would not be allowed to perform their priestly duties.

The Lord focused on the priests’ important duties that were not directly associated with the sacrifices of the law of Moses. Their responsibility was to speak truth, walk in peace, and turn away from iniquity (Malachi 2:6–7). Therefore, obedience is not so much an outward ritual expression but an inner love toward God and neighbor that is manifested by service (Ephesians 2:10). “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matthew 7:22).

⁸ See “Gospel Classics: The Father and the Son,” *Ensign*, April 2002, 12–18.

2:11–13

The holiness that had been profaned can be understood as the desecration of the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33–34), by marrying a strange God. This implies that this false god had been placed in the most holy area of the temple, a sin reminiscent of the first temple period (2 Kings 23:4). Notice how the sin is described as marriage (a commitment and covenant with a false god). Although the people were sinning, a careful reader will observe that the holy of holies was being associated with marriage. Today, couples covenant in the sealing rooms of temples to be faithful and true to each other. When other distractions and temptations take our time, energy, and devotion, they become our gods.⁹

2:14–16

Continuing with the theme of the previous verses (that is, marriage), the Lord told the people that they were still under covenant with their true spouse despite their wickedness (Malachi 2:14). The Lord was speaking about His covenant relationship with the people, but the marriage imagery conveyed the point. The covenant of marriage states that husband and wife are made one by God.¹⁰ “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). Although the people had “married the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi 2:11), they could return to their covenant marriage with the Lord (compare Jeremiah 2:2).

2:17

As a God of love, the Lord watches and weeps over His people (1 John 4:8, 16; Moses 7:28–32). Some Christian denominations have claimed that God does not have passion (feelings),¹¹ but Malachi quoted the Lord Jehovah, stating that the evil in which His people “delighteth” wearied Him. He was wearied by the people’s disobedience. God’s love is made manifest in His mercy and judgment.

Malachi 3

3:1–6

In Hebrew, the name Malachi means “my messenger” (see the “Historical Context” section). Prophetically, this passage has multiple fulfillments. In the first century, Mark (the earliest written Gospel) identified John the Baptist as the Lord’s messenger preparing the way for Jesus Christ (Mark 1:2, 4). In the modern dispensation, multiple messengers have been sent to restore the covenants and truths of the gospel (Doctrine and Covenants 45:9). In both ancient and modern times, Jesus Christ has gone to the temple (Mark 11:15; Doctrine and Covenants 110:1–4). The temple is an overarching theme in the book of Malachi.

⁹ See Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976.

¹⁰ Malachi 2:15; compare Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:25–28.

¹¹ See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, originally published in 1647.

The comparison of Lord's return to a refiner's fire is accompanied by the question, "Who shall stand when he appeareth?" (Malachi 3:2). The Lord was coming to refine, purify, and purge for the purpose of having a righteous people (and priesthood) to "offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (verse 3). Therefore, those who can stand and abide His coming will be refined and sanctified. It does not say that the true people of God will be perfect upon His arrival and will not need to be refined. All will have the opportunity to be perfected along with the Saints (Ephesians 4:12).

The word *righteous* forms part of the name Melchizedek, which means "king of righteousness." Joseph Smith may have understood this passage about Levitical Priesthood to point to the full restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood: "These sacrifices, as well as every ordinance belonging to the Priesthood, will, when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi be purified, be fully restored and attended to in all their powers, ramifications, and blessings. This ever did and ever will exist when the powers of the Melchizedek Priesthood are sufficiently manifest."¹² To "offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3) may have been associated with the king of righteousness and the Melchizedek Priesthood.

3:7

Here, the Hebrew word translated as "ordinances" does not imply rites or sacraments as used in the Church today but statutes. In other words, the priests had not been following the commandments and were being called to repentance. In the Old Testament, to return was to repent. The Lord also promised to draw closer to His disciples as they repented (see commentary on Zechariah 1:1–6).

3:8–12

Now that the temple was up and running (and its priests were being purified), it was to be maintained. The ancient tithes and offerings were for temple maintenance and the priesthood holders who had no other task but to be in the service of this holy precinct. "The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:1). Jesus understood Malachi's purpose in restoring the tithe and offerings when He visited the Americas. After the turmoil and calamity upon His death, the disciples in the Americas gathered around a temple in Bountiful (a temple that had not been mentioned previously; 3 Nephi 11:1). After several days of instruction, when He was ready to reinstitute proper worship, the resurrected Lord gave to the people Malachi's words regarding the temple tithes and offerings. There was no other instruction in the text of the Book of Mormon regarding the upkeep

¹² See "Instruction on Priesthood, circa 5 October 1840," p. 10, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/instruction-on-priesthood-circa-5-october-1840/19>.

of the temples.¹³ Certainly, after the earthquakes the temple in Bountiful would have needed attention. In the 1840s, tithing went to the construction of the Nauvoo temple.¹⁴

Although the tithe here was for the temporal upkeep of the temple, the Lord covenanted to protect His people and provide for their needs (Malachi 3:10–11). The promises of tithing remain today (Doctrine and Covenants 64:23), and the obedient will prosper (2 Nephi 4:4). “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalms 23:1).

3:13–15

Because the people had not seen the consequences of their actions, they believed it was vain to be obedient. They had become complacent and the wicked prospered (most likely in a superficial way), and they believed they were happy. This was false security. They were not preparing their treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21). “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3; see also 2 Nephi 26:22).

3:16–18

The book or remembrance or book of the living is mentioned often in scripture.¹⁵ The wicked from the previous verses would not be found in the book of remembrance. Verse 2 asked who could abide and remain standing before the Lord’s presence. Here, the answer was given: those who have feared the Lord (Malachi 3:16). These include those who follow the Lord’s statutes, pay tithes and offerings, and are righteous servants (verses 7–8, 18). The Hebrew words translated as “righteous” in verses 3 and 18 are not identical but share the same root and are related. The righteousness of the judged in verse 18 may be connected to the proper exercising of priesthood authority according to verse 3.

The Hebrew word translated as “jewels” in verse 17 is translated as “peculiar treasure” in Exodus 19:5. This passage in Exodus contained temple language that every Latter-day Saint should recognize. Exodus 19:6 explains what is meant by a “peculiar treasure”: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” In the modern dispensation, Joseph Smith restored the knowledge regarding kings and priests. The Prophet taught, “What was the power of Melchisedec? ’Twas not the priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances, and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fulness of the

¹³ King Noah rebuilt a temple but imposed a 20 percent tithe-tax for his own personal benefit. Mosiah 11:3–4, 10; see Leviticus 27:14–27.

¹⁴ See Church History Topics, “Tithing,” online at churchofjesuschrist.org. To learn about tithing struggles during Brigham Young’s presidency, see Samuel D. Brunson, “To Omit Paying Tithing’: Brigham Young and the First Federal Income Tax,” in *Business and Religion: The Intersection of Faith and Finance*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and Michael Hubbard MacKay (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2019), 255–288.

¹⁵ Exodus 32:32–33; Psalms 56:8; 69:28; Daniel 7:10; 12:1; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12.

Melchisedic priesthood are kings and Priests to the most high God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact that Priesthood is a perfect law of Theocracy, and stands as God, to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam.”¹⁶ It is no coincidence that a temple text like Malachi shares affinities with the Restoration.

Malachi 4

4:1

Although some Christians may interpret language regarding burning as pointing to hellfire and brimstone, fire in the Old Testament was also a symbol of the Lord’s glory.¹⁷ This imagery follows the message at the beginning of the previous chapter: “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? (Malachi 3:2). The messenger’s coming would be as a refiner’s fire, like a cleansing soap (3:1–3). However, those who would not “do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25) would be left without “root” and “branch” (forefathers and children). Their disobedience and apostasy would affect their whole family tree. They would break the link between the blessings of the forefathers and the future generations. “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees” (Matthew 4:10). Although not often applied to the family tree, John the Baptist’s words can also be applied to the cutting off of a family lineage.

4:2–3

In the ancient world, righteousness was associated more with the idea of justice. Therefore, the glory of the judgment day would heal, not “burn.”¹⁸ Justice would be exacted upon their enemies. The people of God would metaphorically trample upon the wicked. Perhaps the apostle Paul understood this not in military terms but in terms of judgment and authority when he said, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (1 Corinthians 6:2).

4:4

The law of Moses is based on love (Leviticus 18:19), but many found it tedious, leading Paul to say its only purpose was to expose sin (Romans 3:19–20). Mosiah understood the importance of keeping the law, highlighting that “were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13:27–28). Although the law of Moses was never to stand alone, that is not to say it was not divinely instituted:

¹⁶ Malachi 4:1. See History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1708, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/80>.

¹⁷ See Genesis 15:7; Exodus 3:2; 14:24; Deuteronomy 4:24.

¹⁸ In the Book of Mormon lands, the sun is a powerful deity, and either Jesus or Mormon the historian changed “sun of righteousness” to “Son of righteousness” (3 Nephi 25:2).

“Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:34).

4:5–6

Verse 5 returns to the concept of roots and branches from verse 1, which modern revelation employs in the context of judgment: “That they may be wasted away, both root and branch, from under heaven” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:52). While Joseph Smith was learning here a little, there a little about the Restoration, he received the keys of this dispensation immediately after the vision of Elijah in the Kirtland Temple (Doctrine and Covenants 109:13–16). This is a passage of scripture that is cited or alluded to in all four standard works.¹⁹

Joseph Smith taught, “I wish you to understand this subject for it is important & if you will receive it this is the spirit of Elijah that we redeem our dead & connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven & seal up our dead to come forth in the first resurrecti[o]n & here we want the power of Elijah to seal those who dwell on earth to those which dwell in heaven this is the power of Elijah & the keys.”²⁰

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¹⁹ Luke 1:17; 3 Nephi 25:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 109:14–15.

²⁰ See “Discourse, 10 March 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [208], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-10-march-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/4>.